当年明月

THOSE STORIES OF MING

Translated by Fred Liu

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Volume I

The Great Martial Emperor

Book of Zhu Yuan Zhang

Introduction

It took me six months to contemplate on the work below, which mainly describes some of the stories about the Ming dynasty in its three hundred years from 1344 to 1644. It is based on historical records, in chronological order and using real people and events as the main storyline. I mixed the narratives with some technics in writing fictions and psychological analysis. There are also some comments on the social economical systems of the times.

It is necessary to make it clear this work is a description on the official history, referencing more than twenty books of historical records, books of notes, and books of essays, including *Chronicles of Ming*, *Annals of Ming*, *The Official History of Ming*, and *The Complete Histories and Chronicles of Ming*. Although many popular and contemporary literary techniques and expressions are used, most of the historical figures and events, even down to people's conversations, are based on historical references. To keep stories fluid, the references are not listed.

Because in the past I have read a lot of books that are too pedantic, I have grown into a habit to abhor those books that are artificially made to be esoteric. Actually histories can be very interesting and all histories can be written for fun reading. I hope I can do just that.

To be honest, I don't know what kind of book I am writing. It's not a novel and it's not a book on history. To me, the genre is not important. What I want to write is a book that allows people to easily understand history and a history that is fun to read.

That's it.

Chapter One

Childhood

Let's start from a personnel record.

Name: Zhu Yuan Zhang

Alias (nickname): Zhu Double Eight, or Zhu Guo Rui.

Sex: Male.

Race: Han.

Blood Type: ?

Education: No diplomas awarded. Not an outstanding talent, not a recommended man, not a distinguished scholar, nor any other type of scholar. Did some self-learning later.

Occupation: Emperor.

Family Background (for at least three generations): peasant.

Dates of birth and death: 1328-1398.

Favorite Color: Yellow (this doesn't seem to be allowed as a personal preference).

Relations:

Father: Zhu Fifty Four, peasant.

Mother: Wife Chen, peasant (sorry, her name doesn't seem to be available in any historical records).

Motto: Yours is mine, mine is still mine.

Work Experience:

1328 – 1344, cattle herder.

1344 – 1347, monk, primary job: go out begging (this ……).

1347 – 1352, monk, primary job: sound the bell.

1352 – 1368, rebel (this means violence).

1368 – 1398, primary job: carry out the duty of an emperor.

Everything started in an evening in 1328, peasant Zhu Fifty Four's wife Chen gave birth to a baby boy. Everyone knows now, this boy was the later Zhu Yuan Zhang.

When describing the birth of emperors, ensuing historical records always include some similar extraordinary meteorological phenomenon, such as wind blowing, a thunderstorm, fragrances, blinking stars in the sky, or glowing red aura everywhere. Regardless, it was all intended to tell you this person was different from everyone else. Mr. Zhu Yuan Zhang was not an exception. When he was born, crimson lights shed the whole ground and in the night some strange lights emanated from his house, which caused neighbors to rush over to help, for they thought his house was on fire (per *Chronicles of Ming*).

But at the time peasant Zhu Fifty Four's mood wasn't the kind of joyful anxiety like the mood of present day fathers waiting in hospital delivery rooms. As the father who already had three sons and two daughters, his main concern was how to feed them.

Peasant Zhu Fifty Four's job mainly consisted of two parts. He owned a tofu store. But his main income came from leasing the land from a landlord, which meant that as a member of this family of laboring class, he must work continuously to maintain a living.

One month after (a custom in the Yuan dynasty), the junior Zhu Fifty Four was born; his parents gave him a name: Zhu Double Eight, which could also be called Zhu Eight Eight. Here we need to explain why the names of the members of the Zhu Double Eight family are all very unique.

Zhu Double Eight's great-great grandfather's name: Zhu Hundred Six;

Zhu Double Eight's great grandfather's name: Zhu Forty Nine;

Zhu Double Eight's grandfather's name: Zhu Day One;

His father's name has been introduced, which is Zhu Fifty Four. They were given these names not because the Zhu's were mathematicians. It was because in the Yuan dynasty, ordinary people were not allowed to have names until they were schooled or obtained office. They were allowed to only name by the ages of their parents or the date of the birth (birth registrars must be thoroughly dazed).

Zhu Double Eight spent his childhood in a dilapidated hut that was cool in winter, warm in summer, well ventilated, and well lighted by natural light. His main job was a cowherd for the landlord Liu De. He wanted to go to school, but Zhu Fifty Four couldn't afford the tuition. He didn't have the spirits like that of Li Mi[1], who hung books on ox horns, and he of course

[1] Li Mi was one of the rebel leaders in late Sui Dynasty. Legend says he read books by hanging them on the horns of his cattle.

didn't have a high level official like Yang Su[2] to recognize him. He dutifully herded cattle for Liu De for twelve years.

He had to feed himself.

At this time, Zhu Double Eight's dream was to live well enough so that when he turned sixteen, he would be able to ask Madame Wu of the same village to find a dexterous and industrious girl as his wife, then he would give birth to his own sons and daughters, with names like Zhu Thirty Two, or Zhu Forty, and when Zhu Thirty Two had grown up, he would let him go herding cattle for landlord Little Liu De.

That was the happy future life expected by the sixteen year old Zhu Double Eight.

The China of this time was ruled by the very corrupted Yuan Dynasty. The Mongolian conquers didn't seem to consider the ordinary people under their rule human beings. They even often pondered to kill all those who occupied the land and then use the land to raise livestock (per *The Official History of Yuan*). From taxes to corvees, everything that could be conjured up by human brains was about collecting money. On holidays, a "holiday fee" was collected. A "routine affairs fee" was collected for work. There was an "official affairs fee" for legal disputes. Well, I am so scared, how about I just stay at home, and just do nothing? That was also not permitted. There was a fee for no reason, the "disbursing fee". Aren't you impressed?

Thus, after ruling China for over sixty years by the people on horsebacks, the state apparatus was weighted down so much that it could bear no more. The Yuan Dynasty of this age was like a camel that could bear no more weight, waiting for the last straw and the straw was soon to arrive.

The year 1344 was an extraordinary year. In this year, Heaven finally decided to give up on Yuan. He brought two disasters to China and at the same time dug a grave for Yuan. He also prepared the epitaph: "When a stone man has his single eye opened up, the Yellow River would be stirred up and the country is to rise up." He thought well about it and also prepared a sexton: Zhu Double Eight. Of course Zhu Double Eight never thought Heaven would assign such an important job to him.

This year, he was seventeen. A disaster was about to fall on him. But at the same time, a great adventure was waiting for him. Just like the legendary phoenix, who suffered, fell into fire, and after toils and tribulations, arose from fire, and became a divine bird glowing in aura.

Zhu Double Eight, come on. Fate is waiting for you!

[2] Yang Su was a powerful late Sui general who once met Li Mi and was impressed by him, which propelled Li Mi's rise.

Chapter Two

Disasters

Year four of Utmost Justice of Yuan (AD 1344) came. Right at the beginning of the year, high level officials of the Empire of Yuan received two pieces of news. First, the Yellow River flooded and hundreds of thousands of people lived along the banks in Shandong and Henan became refugees. Although they were not considered humans, they must be watched for riots. Repairing the levees of the Yellow River became a necessary thing. But surprisingly, there were two different sides on this in the Yuan government. One side thought the repairs must be done and the other side thought it must not be done. In hind sight, this difference seems to be incredible. The Yellow River flooded, were they willing to leave levees unrepaired and let many people drown? There have been too many incredible things in China's history and this one is also not an exception.

To be fair, on this matter, if the purpose was to uphold the rule of the Yuan, those who insisted on repairing the levees were not necessarily loyal to the empire, and those against it were not necessarily treacherous. It would have to take seven years to see the nuances in it.

Among those who insisted on the repair was Toto, Yuan's famous prime minister, who could be said as the dynasty's last celebrated minister. He implemented many reforms. He was ethical and honest in his work. He was also very capable (he was the chief editor of *The Official History of Song*). But he couldn't imagine that a big explosive mine was implanted underneath the dynasty due to his insistence on repairing the levees. The mine was wired and just needed a small spark to set it off.

The other piece of news was the Huai River region had been ravaged by plague and drought. To the Yuan government, this seemed to be easier to deal with. If people died of hunger or disease, fewer of them would be able to cause trouble. Of course in appearance they still had to do something. The emperor (the Obedient Emperor of Yuan) issued an imperial decree to provide disaster relief. Senior officials at the Central Secretariat were responsible for the collection and distribution of food and funds. Of course a little misappropriation was understandable. The relief materials were sent to the roads (Yuan's administrative unit under province) and the local officials kept a little bit of it for themselves. Then they were sent to

prefectures and counties. After several layers, when the materials reached to the ordinary people, all that left were grain husks. Then the local officials sent their gratitude to the emperor. As usual, they would say something like thanks to the heavenly benevolence and compared the emperor to the ancient emperors Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang[3]. The emperor read the reports and felt he did a great deed, and took a note of this in his heart.

All were happy, all were happy, and everyone was very satisfied.

But ordinary people were not satisfied. Many of them were not satisfied.

Zhu Double Eight was surely one of those who were extremely unsatisfied.

After the disaster struck, on the sixth of April, Zhu Double Eight's father died of hunger. On the ninth, his big brother died. On the twelfth, the eldest son of his big brother died. On the twenty second, his mother died.

If this was a personal diary, it would be one of the most sorrowful diaries in the world.

Zhu Double Eight's wishes were not unreasonable. All he wanted was a home. He wanted his own children. He wanted his meek, obedient, and simple-minded parents, who labored their entire lives and never bullied anyone, to spend last years of their lives peacefully, or at least have enough food.

His family was not big but everyone in the family was amicable and supported each other. His parents were poor but they still brought back some happy surprises to Double Eight after a day's work in the fields. Sometimes it was a small dragon fly and sometimes it was the meat of a pig head, which was discarded by the landlord. This was Zhu Double Eight's family. But now everything was gone.

Zhu Double Eight's elder sister was already married off. His third eldest brother married and lived in his wife's house. Except Zhu Double Eight's second eldest brother, there was no one else left in the family.

The seventeen year old Zhu Double Eight saw his loved ones die one after another before his eyes. But he could not do anything. In the human world, nothing could be more painful than this.

All he could do to relieve himself was cry bitterly. But after that, he must face an important problem. He needed to bury his parents. But he had neither coffins and clothes for the dead nor a grave. He went to see landlord Liu De. He hoped Liu De, recognizing that his father had been a tenant all his life and a place could be found to bury his father.

Liu De simply refused. The reason was simple, your parents' deaths are none of my business, he worked for me, but I fed him.

Zhu Double Eight was out of means. He and his second eldest brother wrapped the bodies of their loved ones in straw mats, put them on door planks, and carried the bodies all over the

[3] Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang are legendary emperors of pre-historical China, who were thought as wise.

places, hoping to find a place to bury his parents. Although the world was immense and there were lands everywhere, none of it belonged to them.

Luckily some kind hearted people pitied them and gave them a piece of land to bury their parents. “Their souls wafting afar and my parents are in nowhere, my spirits are low and unsettled”. This was the sentiment of a later well fed Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Zhu Double Eight could not understand that his parents labored in the fields for their entire lives, yet after their deaths there was no place for them to rest. The landlords never worked in the fields but they never worried about food and clothes. Why? He probably couldn’t think deeper into this puzzle because his priority was to eat, he had to live on.

More than once when he felt hopeless, he prayed to the heavenly gods, from the Taoists’ The Ultra Supreme Gentleman to the Buddhists’ Buddha, anyone that he knew the name of. He prayed for only one thing. He wished to live with his parents and had something to eat.

But the results were very disappointing. The heart of a child began to become cold. He knew no one but himself would save him.

The embers of revenge started to conflagrate from the bottom of his heart.

Overcoming his weaknesses, sufferings like these made him strong.

In order to feed himself, he decided to become a monk.

Life as a monk

Zhu Double Eight’s place of choice was the nearby Temple of Imperial Awakening. In the temple, he worked like a tenant labor. He found that except those monks didn’t have hair on their heads, they treated him no better than how Liu De treated him. The monks had their own land and were also allowed to marry (Yuan allowed monks to marry). If they were rich, they were also allowed to open pawn shops.

But they also needed someone to do the chores. The monks in the temple never recited Buddhist scriptures, they never worshipped the Buddha, and they even never dusted the Buddha’s golden statue. All these chores were naturally done by the recently arrived newbie Zhu Double Eight.

Zhu Double Eight endured all these. But besides these menial jobs, he was also the janitor, the warehouse keeper, and the lamp oiler (the Everlasting Lamp). Even though, he was often scolded. When those monks were drinking and feasting, he was mopping the floors that had been trotted by patrons of the temple. In every lonely evening, he sat in the firewood room, stared in the skies from the window, and thought about the parents who lived with him for just seventeen years.

He ought to be satisfied, he now could feed himself and that should be it, isn’t it?

But Fate seemed to want to toughen his resolve. After he was admitted to the temple for

just over fifty days, due to the severe famine, all monks were required to go out and seek for alms. Seeking alms is just begging. We all are familiar with the mantra of our comrade, The Monk of Tang[4], which is: "Wu Kong, you go and find some alms." In layman's terms, this is just to say: "Wu Kong, you go and get some food." I once researched on the subject of seeking for alms, and found Comrade Zhu Double Eight was bullied even when he was seeking for alms. Because there were too many monks, territories were created for alms seeking. Rich areas were assigned to the leader's relatives and the poor areas were assigned to Comrade Zhu Double Eight.

No matter what, if you die of hunger, you deserve it. No one demanded you to be Zhu Double Eight.

The areas assigned to Zhu Double Eight were west of the Huai River and Henan. These were the main areas that were famine stricken, who would offer alms to him?

But from here, Fate showed her smiles on him.

Leading a life of a tramp, Zhu Double Eight could only walk and there were no rides to catch. It was genuine tramping. He walked and begged, from village to village and from home to home. He slept in the open. It was a trial for him every time he knocked on a door. What faced him usually were disdainful eyes and ridicules. To Zhu Double Eight, knocking a door open could mean humiliation, but not knocking on the door would mean death from hunger.

Zhu Double Eight already lost his parents and his home. All he had left was just a tiny bit of self-esteem. But living as a beggar stripped him of his last protection, to beg meant no self-esteem.

Between self-esteem and the need to live, which one is more important?

Yes, Zhu Double Eight, only after you lost everything, did you understand your power and greatness.

Zhu Double Eight was different from other beggars and precisely because of the difference, he didn't end up begging all his life.

During his begging, he carefully took notes of the geography and cultures of the west of the Huai River. He got his eyes open, enriched his knowledge, and got acquainted with many other outstanding people (actually they were also beggars). At the same time, he developed his own religion, Mingism. He believed when darkness covered the earth, a great Maitreya would descend to earth. Of course, per his own life experience, it's hard to say if he truly believed in Maitreya. We have reasons to believe in his heart, the real Maitreya was just himself.

But Zhu Double Eight's most important gain was that, from a helpless child who watched his parents die, a lackey who could only weep in the fire woods room after being bullied, he had become a soldier, who could face all hardships with determination and a soldier who

[4] The Monk of Tang is a fictional character in the famous novel *Journey to the West*.

armed to his heart.

Prolonged hardships are the best ways to toughen someone's resolve. Many people complain and totter when facing difficulties. Although some others have to accept the hardships, they never waver in their hearts. They try hard continuously and believe they will eventually prevail.

There is no question Zhu Double Eight belongs to the later.

If it could be said before he started begging, he was still a naive youth, then after three years of tramping, when he returned to the Temple of Imperial Awakening, he had become someone who believed he could conquer everything.

This is a great transformation. Many people cannot complete such a transformation in their lives. The key to such a transformation is in the heart.

To many of us, the heart is the weakest spot. It easily gets hurt. Betrayed in love, loss of loved ones, or loss of friendships are all very heavy blows to the heart. Yet to Zhu Double Eight, was there anything else unbearable? He lost everything. He could do nothing but watching his parents die. For survival he competed for food with dogs. He was scolded and disdained by others. No other afflictions were more severe! We have reasons to believe in an evening after a painful rumination, Zhu Double Eight turned this most tender spot into the most powerful source of strength.

Yes, even if you have a look envied by everyone, are well-read and educated, or have inexhaustible wealth, you still cannot prove your strength. Only the strength from the heart is the real strength.

As Zhu Double Eight prepared to leave the West of Huai, where he begged, to return to the Temple of Imperial Awakening, he carefully reviewed about the place where he spent three years. He thought about what he gained and what he lost. Then he packed up and was on the road home.

"Maybe I can come back", Zhu Double Eight thought.

Chapter Three

On a Journey

In year eleven of Utmost Justice (AD 1351), Heaven placed the last straw on Yuan. The end of Yuan came.

The answers to our puzzles were also revealed. In hind sight, Toto's insistence on fixing the Yellow River was based on good intentions, but he misunderstood the pains of those who were against him. He also didn't understand the Yuan bureaucrats, who were corrupt to the bones. Now he was about to taste the bitter fruits of his efforts.

When Yuan issued the order to have a hundred seventy thousand labors along the river banks to repair the levees, officials at all levels got very excited. First, wages allocated by the emperor for the levee repair, as well as food for the labors, were subject to embezzlement. Officials could care less if the people had nothing to eat. All these meant a big chunk of income for the officials. Funds for the project were also subject to embezzlement. The over flooded Yellow River would never drown any officials.

These were the ways to make money for those who were in charge of the repair. Those who were not directly involved with the repair also needed to make money. It was simple. A project as big as this required quotas for labors. If dozens of labors needed to be found, they'd go to villages and grab all the men they ran into. The explanation was levee repair. If someone didn't want to do it, he'd have to cough up the money.

No money? Just bring over anything valuable!

Poor Toto, he was a good theorist but not a practitioner.

The old trick took its stage. When the peasants' diggings reached Shandong, they dug out a single eyed stone man from the river bed. The following words were carved on the back of the stone man: "When a stone man has his single eye opened up, the Yellow River would be stirred up and the country is to rise up." All of a sudden, the workers found these were the lyrics that they'd been passing around and singing on the work fields for several years. People's minds were disturbed.

This was a real trickery, which could even be made into a computer program. Every time before a rebellion, this kind of superstition was employed, but nonetheless, people always bought it.

What ensued seemed to be a matter of course. A few days later, at the place where Zhu Double Eight begged (Yingzhou, now Buyang of Anhui province), Han Shan Tong and Liu Fu Tong started a rebellion. Their rebellion was no different from the previous ones. Just like before, they created a religious organization. This time, the religion was the White Lotus Society. Of course if they dared to rebel, their titles should also be different. All of a sudden, Han Shan Tong, who perhaps had been peasants for generations, changed his name to Zhao and became a descendant of the royal family of the Song Dynasty. Liu Fu Tong became the descendant of General Liu Guang Shi[5].

Their fate was also similar to that of the previous peasant rebels. They rebelled, were suppressed, and late comers prevailed. This seemed to be the predestinations of the likes of Chen Sheng and Wu Guang[6].

Despite the way they used to rebel was not new, their greatness and stature in history were not hindered. In history books, there would be forever an entry: in AD 1351, Han Shan Tong and Liu Fu Tong were the first to raise the banner against the imperial rule of Yuan.

Since ancient times, it has always been very difficult to create a dynasty, but it has been relatively easy to destroy one. The saying, that a rickety wall would be pushed down by everyone and a broken drum would be pounded on by everyone, was not originated out of nowhere.

In the Yuan era when people were divided into four classes, if a highest classed Mongol killed a lowest classed Southerner, the only punishment was a fine of a donkey. If the one killed was a vagabond, maybe even a donkey would not be needed. The thoughts of the Mongolian nobles seemed to be very strange. Even after they had occupied China, they still thought themselves as guests. They grabbed and took whatever they wanted from the host, never cared if these were their own. In their frames of mind, the Southerners were only capable of enduring their tortures.

But they were wrong. Those slaves would rise up and rebel. When anger and discontent exceeded the limit, when survival like a dog became a luxury, revolt was the only recourse. To revolt was to remain alive.

The fire finally got started and was poised to spread fast.

In just one year, there were several dozens of rebellions in the seemingly powerful Empire of Yuan. Millions of people joined the rebels. Even the once unstoppable Mongol cavalries lost their previous glories and could not salvage the desperate situation. The Empire of Yuan was

[5] Liu Guang Shi was a famous Song general.
[6] Chen Sheng and Wu Guang were leaders of the first large peasant rebellion in China's history.

like a dilapidated wall, which would fall by just one more kick.

At this moment Zhu Double Eight was still performing the duty of a monk. By any measure, he didn't show any inclination to join the rebels. Although his hatred of Yuan was beyond all bounds, for the ordinary Zhu Double Eight, joining the rebellion was risky. If he got caught, he would be beheaded. This forced him to think thoroughly about it.

In many books, Zhu Double Eight was described as a natural born hero. In scripts of plays, when the natural born hero Zhu Double Eight heard about the rebellions, he immediately took up arms and joined the rebels, which showed his determination for revolutionary ideals, etc.

But I think that was not the real Zhu Double Eight.

As an ordinary person, when a decision could cause him to lose his head, he would not take the matter so lightly. If Zhu Double Eight were really someone that made rash decisions, he would not be a real hero.

The real Zhu Double Eight was a man with fear. He had suffered extreme pains and hated Yuan to the bone. But he also understood the value of life. Once he chose to revolt, he could not go back.

Knowing all the possible hardships and sufferings, never stopping the struggle under the threat of death, but still being able to overcome himself, and then still making this choice, that would be the real courage.

I think the Zhu Double Eight of this kind was the real hero. A hero is one who overcomes himself and does not fear death.

Zhu Double Eight's life in the temple was routine and dull. But this routine and dull life was disrupted by the rebellious conflagrations. Ironically, the ones that disrupted his life were not the rebels, but those Yuan officials.

In the battles against the rebels, if someone was defeated, he would be punished by his superior. But the task of putting down the rebellion must be accomplished, thus the officials of the Yuan dynasty made a resolute decision. They would prey on the ordinary people. If they couldn't defeat the rebels, then they could capture some ordinary people to report back, and then kill them like they were rebels.

Looking from this angle, the corrupted Yuan officials did their best to overthrow the rule of Yuan. They made great contributions.

At this time, the situation facing Zhu Double Eight was dire. If he didn't join the rebels, he would very probably be nabbed by some official, and then killed under someone else's name. But joining the rebels also was very risky. If he was defeated by the Yuan army, he wouldn't be able to save his life.

At this moment, a letter completely changed his fate.

His childhood friend Tang He wrote him a letter. In the letter he said he was now a Knight of a Thousand in the rebel army. He hoped Zhu Double Eight would join the rebellion and become rich together. Zhu Double Eight read it, didn't show any emotion, and burned the letter. He was not ready to join the rebels.

But in the evening, his monk brother told him someone already knew he read a letter from the rebels and was about to report him.

Zhu Double Eight was finally pushed to the end of the road.

What followed was hard thinking and painful choices. He had three options: one, stay in the temple, two, escape, three, revolt.

Zhu Double Eight could not make up his mind. He sought for ideas from another person, whose name was Zhou De Xing. Later we will have more words about him.

Zhou De Xing didn't seem to have a better idea. He offered Zhu Double Eight a divination session (what kind of idea is this?) just to see what would be the best course to take.

The result of the divination was: "escape or stay would be ominous, face danger with spirit would not be harmful", which meant it would be both inauspicious to either escape or stay put. To revolt would be harmless.

Zhu Double Eight saw he had been pushed to a corner. He had wanted no more than just staying alive, farming couple of acres of land, and being dutiful to his parents. But he couldn't do those things. His parents were burdened with heavy land taxes and corvees. They worked diligently everyday but they ended up with kinsmen dead and family broken. He escaped to the temple just to get himself fed. But now he was about to be reported to authorities, which probably meant losing his head.

He could bear no more.

Then let it be revolt! Damn it, revolt!

This is the real life version of being forced to go to Mt Liang[7]. It's also the only choice for the poor peasants in the imperial era. Who doesn't care about his own life? Who wants to fight? When they were unable to remain alive anymore, those peasants were forced to shed their blood and risk their lives to push the imperial society forward, until it was dead.

That was their fate.

Thus I think peasant rebellions in China's histories should be considered positive. The peasants were probably not so generous and they all had their own aims, but they had no

[7] Mt Liang is a small marsh island in a lake in Shandong, occupied by the outlaws in the novel *Tales of the Marshes*.

other choices.

Tang He thus became Zhu Double Eight's first comrade in arms. In the days ahead, he would finish the tough journey together with Zhu Double Eight.

But Tang He could not have imaged that he would be the only one that accompanied him to the end of the journey.

Chapter Four

Start Right Here

Year twelve of Utmost Justice (AD 1352), City of Haozhou.

Guo Zi Xing, the defender of the city, was in the marshal's house. He was thinking hard to find a strategy. Haozhou had been surrounded by the Yuan army for a long time. If the situation continued, the defense could not last long.

Just at this moment, a soldier came in to report they caught a spy and requested an order of execution. If it was before, Guo Zi Xing would not have asked and would have given the order. But today, he opened his mouth and asked, "how do you know he is a spy?" The soldier replied: "He said he came to join the fight. Now we are surrounded by the Yuan army, who could have come to join? He must be a spy of the Yuan army".

Guo Zi Xing almost burst into laughs. Join the fight? The Yuan army was about to enter the city. Yet someone wanted to join. This would not be a smart excuse. He couldn't stop his curiosity and wanted to see this spy.

He mounted his horse and went to the city gate and saw a strange looking man. In today's words, this man's face looked like the earth enveloping the sky, his chin protruded forward, and even stranger, his forehead also protruded forward. The face shaped like the crescent moon blade of a halberd, protruding forward at the top and bottom, but sinking inward in the middle (take a look at the portrait of Comrade Zhu Yuan Zhang).

Of course this man was our Zhu Double Eight.

Guo Zi Xing came to Zhu Double Eight, ordered to untie him, and asked: "Are you a spy? Why are you here?"

Zhu Double Eight replied calmly: "I am not a spy, I came to join you."

Guo Zi Xing laughed: "Don't you know the situation? Can there be anyone wanting to join us? You don't need to argue, in a moment you'll be brought out and beheaded!"

All Zhu Double Eight did was a simple reply: "Hmmm."

Guo Zi Xing looked at Zhu Double Eight in the eyes and hoped to see panic, which was

one of his usual amusements.

But in this man's eyes, he saw only calmness.

Guo Zi Xing dared not to look down upon this man. Apparently, this man could not be frightened. Thus he carefully inquired Zhu Double Eight's name and origin. When Zhu Double Eight said he was introduced by Knight of a Thousand Tang He, Guo Zi Xing finally realized he indeed came to join them.

He was very impressed by Zhu Double Eight, he therefore didn't assign him to Tang He's unit. Rather he placed him by his side as his personal assistance (body guard).

In the army, it didn't take long for Zhu Double Eight to demonstrate his talent. Comparing to the other peasant soldiers, he was an outstanding man. He fought bravely and was intelligent. He was calm in dealing with problems and always gave full thoughts on everything (take note of this quality). He was loyal to his friends. When faced with danger, he was the first to step up. All these earned him high admirations and respects. With the help of his fellow townsman Tang He, after two months of service, he was promoted to a squad leader, which was his first official position.

As the head of the personal body guards of Guo Zi Xing, Zhu Double Eight was up to the duty. He was unlike the other soldiers. He never vied for money and treasure. Every time he got his share of the spoils, he presented it to Guo Zi Xing. If he received any reward, he distributed it among the soldiers. Because he was very talented, learned writing by himself, and accurate in analyzing problems, Guo Zi Xing took him as his confidant and think tank. Zhu Double Eight's position in the army gradually became important.

Just at this time, Zhu Double Eight changed his name to Zhu Yuan Zhang, the word Zhang means a kind of sharp jade instrument. This Zhu Yuan Zhang was actually the "sharp weapon to kill Yuan". Zhu Double Eight thought of himself as the sharp weapon to destroy the Yuan dynasty, and the sharp weapon was manufactured by the Yuan rulers themselves. In the next twenty years, they all would dread this name.

Tang He

In the army, Tang He was a strange person. When Zhu Yuan Zhang initially joined the army, he was already a Knight of a Thousand. But he highly regarded Zhu Yuan Zhang. In the camp, people could see a strange phenomenon, Tang He, who ranked much higher than the soldier Zhu Yuan Zhang, always walked behind him. He didn't care about people's looks. Even stranger, Zhu Yuan Zhang seemed to think that was a natural thing and never deferred.

We have to admire the foresight of Tang He. He knew Zhu Yuan Zhang was not just a fish

in a pond. Using today's jargons, he was realistic. I believe this very quality of him enabled him to survive in the later bloody struggles.

While in the army, Zhu Yuan Zhang got a wife. Comparing to those later empresses and concubines, this wife could be considered as one of the factors that made Zhu Yuan Zhang successful. This girl was the adopted daughter of Guo Zi Xing. Her father's family name was Ma and was a friend of Guo Zi Xing's. After he died, he entrusted this girl to Guo Zi Xing. The girl's name was not known. In the army people called her Damsel Ma. Zhu Yuan Zhang became the son in law of the marshal and Guo Zi Xing got another aide.

We can imagine the joyful feelings of Zhu Yuan Zhang. He finally got a home. He was no longer that Zhu Double Eight that no one cared and tended. If he was hungry, someone would make meals for him. If he felt cold, someone would clothe him. The feeling of having a home made him happy. This kind of feeling accompanied him for many years.

By this time, Zhu Yuan Zhang had risen to the position of the army's inspector general, which would be equivalent to the head of the rebel army's office of headquarters. He did well. To those who took advantage of the public's assets and disbursed reimbursements carelessly, Zhu Yuan Zhang stood his ground. Because he was strict on himself, no one could complain much. If it continued like this, he could become an excellent finance bookkeeper. But Heaven didn't want to let him live in comfort. In the near future, he would be facing even bigger troubles.

The main problem was the class status of Guo Zi Xing. He was not a peasant. Rather, he was a landlord (can't think of a reason why he would revolt). Among the leaders in Haozhou, there were four others besides him. These four people were led by Sun De Ya. These four were all peasants. Serious strife existed between them and Guo Zi Xing.

Soon, the conflicts erupted. One day, Guo Zi Xing was strolling in the city of Haozhou. All of a sudden a group of people out of nowhere kidnapped him. These men seemed to be not interested in demanding a ransom. They severely beat him and jailed him. Zhu Yuan Zhang heard the news and was shocked. He immediately went to the home of Sun De Ya and demanded for Guo. Sun De Ya initially feigned ignorance and expressed surprise. He even pretended to want to go out and find Guo Zi Xing. He said a few words, such as that he could not co-exist under the same roof with the kidnappers. He really demonstrated his skills as an amateur actor.

Zhu Yuan Zhang brought those soldiers who participated the beating to Sun De Ya and told Sun, I have the complete records of your embezzlements and frivolous reimbursements. It's up to you to decide what to do.

With this, Zhu Yuan Zhang rescued the half dead Guo Zi Xing from the basement of Sun's home. From this incident, Zhu Yuan Zhang realized there was no future with these people.

At the same time Guo Zi Xing grew more disgusted of Zhu Yuan Zhang. The reason was simple, Zhu Yuan Zhang was better than him. Guo Zi Xing, an irascible and intolerant leader, could not bear the idea that someone next to him could be actually the one to replace him. Finally one day, he arrested Zhu Yuan Zhang. Throwing someone down into a well and then piling stones on him has been the well-kept habit of some people and the son of Guo Zi Xing was one of them. He ordered the guards not to give food to Zhu Yuan Zhang. He wanted to let Zhu Yuan Zhang starve to death. To save Zhu Yuan Zhang, The kind Damsel Ma put the freshly cooked flatbreads in her bosom and gave them to Zhu Yuan Zhang when she visited him in jail. She got her chest burned but still did it every time.

If someone got a wife like this, what more could the husband ask for.

Nonetheless, Guo Zi Xing didn't want to kill Zhu Yuan Zhang and released him. After this incident, Zhu Yuan Zhang made up his mind to break up with these short sighted people. He asked Guo Zi Xing to lead some troops to go out and fight. Guo Zi Xing happily granted his request.

This is the start of Zhu Yuan Zhang's quest for ultimate supremacy. Once it got started, it wouldn't stop.

Let it start from here!

Zhu Yuan Zhang took the order to attack Guo Zi Xing's hometown, Dingyuan, which demonstrated his father-in-law's sinister intentions. At the time, Dingyuan was heavily defended. Probably Guo Zi Xing let him go and didn't expect to see a live Zhu Yuan Zhang again. But Zhu Yuan Zhang was Zhu Yuan Zhang. He found a gap in the Yuan army's defense, took Dingyuan, and then withdrew before Yuan army's reinforcement arrived. Then he went on to attack Huaiyuan, Anfeng, Hanshan, and Hongxian. He fought four times and was victories four times. He was unstoppable!

After recruiting (may be taking by force) some able-bodied men, Zhu Yuan Zhang came to Zhongli (in today's south of Fengyang in Anhui province), which was his hometown. Here he met twenty four men looking for jobs in Zhu Yuan Zhang's army.

The twenty four men recruited by Manager Zhu Yuan Zhang were of high qualities. Among them was Zhou De Xing, who performed the divination for him. And there was also Xu Da, who was perhaps the best general on earth.

These men also brought in their relatives. One by one by words of mouths, their uncles and nephews all came. Very soon, his army (directly under his command) grew to seven hundred

people.

When Zhu Yuan Zhang came back to Haozhou again, he was already clear on where his future lied. He submitted his resignation to Guo Zi Xing. Guo Zi Xing was very happy. This annoying man was finally going away.

Before Zhu Yuan Zhang left, he did another unexpected thing. He selected twenty four people out of his seven hundred men. He left the rest to Guo Zi Xing. Guo Zi Xing was somewhat surprised, but still happily accepted his request.

This action by Zhu Yuan Zhang can be considered as work for selecting civil servants. The ratio is thirty to one. There is no written test. The recruiters are Zhu Yuan Zhang and his judgment.

His selections were right on the spot. Just look at the names of these men: Xu Da, Tang He, and Zhou De Xing. The twenty four men later all became senior officials of the Ming dynasty.

Huang Chao of Tang dynasty, after failing the government exam, stood in front of the Gate of Chang'an[8] and felt depressed. But courage filled his heart and he wrote a poem, *Ode to Chrysanthemums*, which became famous, very famous.

Just wait for the late autumn to come by,
When I start to bloom, every other flower starts to die.
Over the City of Eternal Peace the aromas will fill the air,
In the city soldiers in golden armor are everywhere.

A few years later, he led an army of a hundred thousand and took Chang'an.

At this moment, Zhu Yuan Zhang stood in front of the city gate and looked at the twenty four men behind him. He knew once he took the step, he would be on his own. He either would die in a battle or create a new empire.

He raised his head and looked at the sky. It was still dark and gloomy. It seemed to be ominous to come to such a decision at this time, which reminded him of that desperate divination.

When his parents died and when he labored hard in the temple, he looked at the sky in the night and cried and the sky looked just like this.

Nothing has changed. The only thing changed is myself.

When other flowers are blooming I am not even budding,
When I am blooming all other flowers will be dying.
To fight against the wind from the west,
Put the golden armor on my chest.

[8] Present day Xi'an. Its name literally means the City of Eternal Peace.

Nothing can stop me. Let me start right here!

March on!

Chapter Five

Building up Capitals

Zhu Yuan Zhang's first drum of gold

Zhu Yuan Zhang came to Dingyuan again. For him, conscripting able-bodied men was already a familiar job. He quickly organized a force of a thousand men. He learned that nearby Dingyuan, in Zhangjiabao there was an army of three thousand, which was isolated and needed help. It needed a new boss and attracted Zhu Yuan Zhang's attention.

He came to Zhangiiabao. Upon seeing the camp leader, he was pleasantly surprised: "Aha, it's you."

He knew this camp leader and they had dealt with each other previously. The camp leader called him "Prince Zhu".

The two met and naturally recalled their friendships. I know someone, do you know him? Oh, who the hell are you talking about? I know, I know, he is a brother. Also, Zhang San died and Li Si[9] fell ill. Etc. The more they conversed, the closer they felt toward each other. Then they dined together.

On the dining table, Zhu Yuan Zhang finally uttered his real intentions. If you currently don't have a leader, why not follow me? If we are able to eke out something, you'll get your share. The camp leader was a genuinely honest man, he agreed immediately.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was very happy. But he forgot the habit of the Chinese. Only half, and sometimes even less than half, of what is said while drinking on the dining table can be believed.

Zhu Yuan Zhang probably later thought: We should have signed a contract.

Three days later, the representative of Zhu Yuan Zhang came to the camp. The camp leader gave him a warm welcome:

Welcome! Please sit down. Don't be shy, why are you here, sir? What, take all of us to you?

[9] Zhang San and Li Si are names used to refer to a no particular person, like the English names John Doe.

On this, we need to think over again.

What, did I promise that?

When? Three days ago, I don't remember (while looking at his aides). Do you remember? Was there such a thing? Oh, no.

This is a misunderstanding. We'll seriously consider what you told us. Don't let Prince Zhu worry about this.

What, you want to leave? Come on, stay a little longer. Oh, if you've got things to do then we won't hold you. Send our best wishes to Prince Zhu, feel free to come by any time!

In this way, Zhu Yuan Zhang was soundly fooled.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang could not be easily bullied. He instructed his men to invite the camp leader for diner and specifically told him that they'd long prepared some well-known dishes. Upon knowing there's a banquet, the camp leader gladly came. As soon as he entered Zhu Yuan Zhang's camp, he was immediately bounded up. There was no diner for him. He had become a wrapped rice dumpling. Then Zhu Yuan Zhang sent the order to the people in the other camp in the name of the camp leader. This is how three thousand people became the subordinates of Zhu Yuan Zhang.

The next target was Hengjianshan. There was an army of twenty thousand there. But this army couldn't be taken over by persuasion. The leader of the army was Miao Da Heng (his status can be identified just by his name)[10]. He originally followed the Yuan army to attack Haozhou and hoped for some spoil. But the attack failed. Therefore he took the troops here. Zhu Yuan Zhang attacked him with four thousand men.

This was the first time Zhu Yuan Zhang did a battle with inferior number of men.

Zhu Yuan Zhang wisely avoided the day and chose to attack the enemy force in the night. A fool like Miao Da Heng wasn't a match. He didn't put up much resistance before he surrendered. Zhu Yuan Zhang's army became twenty thousand.

Zhu Yuan Zhang reorganized the troops. Unexpectedly, he didn't say anything like live and die together, or share wealth together. He castigated the surrendered soldiers. He let them think why an army so big was so powerless and gave up so easily. Then he made his point clear. This was all because there were no trainings and disciplines. To be successful, there must be more training and strict disciplines must be followed.

The statement was comprehensible and reasonable. Everyone who listened agreed.

Right after this, Zhu Yuan Zhang's army distinguished itself from all those other motleys of

[10] Da Heng literally means big shot, thus the author's comment.

riotous peasant armies. In his hands, he got elite troops.

In the meantime, two brothers came from Dingyuan to join Zhu Yuan Zhang. One was Feng Guo Yong. The other was Feng Guo Sheng. Zhu Yuan Zhang thought both were of use and kept them. This Feng Guo Sheng was the later Feng Sheng, who swept across Mongolia.

In year thirteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1353), Zhu Yuan Zhang decided to attack Chuzhou. Then just at this moment, a man walked into his camp.

This was a middle aged man dressed like an intellectual. He looked debonair and amicable. Zhu Yuan Zhang initially didn't take notice of this man. He only saw this man had a good handwriting, so he took him as his secretary. The man didn't complain and did his job well. One day, Zhu Yuan Zhang was warming himself by the fire in the tent and muttered to himself: "There is fighting every day and everywhere, when is this going to end?"

The man replied calmly: "When riots erupted in Qin dynasty, Liu Bang, the Supreme Grandfather of Han, also grew up from an ordinary family. He was generous and open-minded, he was good at using the right talents, and it took him only five years to accomplish his imperial ambition. Now the world is not Yuan's anymore. You, the commander-in-chief, your home base is in Haozhou, which is not far from Liu Bang's home. Even if that isn't where the imperial prospect is rooted, at least it's close." After this, he paused and uttered the most critical two sentences:

"If you learn from Liu Bang and act like him, the world must be yours!"

Zhu Yuan Zhang looked at this intellectual in surprise. Yes, that's where I am headed. If Liu Bang was able to do it, why can't I do it? Then he sat straight and saluted the man.

This man was the one that ranked the first among those men who contributed to the founding of the dynasty. He was Li Shan Chang.

Chuzhou was at a strategic location. Ouyang Xiu of Song dynasty once wrote: "Around Chuzhou are all mountains". It is obvious that this was an important place that was easy to defend but hard to attack.

But the troops who defended Chuzhou were not as hard to deal with as the terrain. Once the battle began, Hua Yun, a valiant general under Zhu Yuan Zhang led a thousand cavalrymen rushed and broke the middle of the enemy's line. The Yuan army was routed. Zhu Yuan Zhang then attacked with his whole army and took Chuzhou.

After occupying Chuzhou, Zhu Yuan Zhang received three more important men. They were his nephew Zhu Wen Zheng, his brother in law Li Zhen, and his nephew Li Wen Zhong[11].

[11] Probably Li Zhen's son, thus Zhu Yuan Zhang's nephew.

Please remember these names. They would all be the main figures in the ensuing war that shocked the heaven and the earth.

Looking from this angle, Zhu Yuan Zhang's birth place indeed was rich in talent. The advisers and generals he recruited were not less able than those from any other eras. There were so many talents in the Anhui province!

By now, Zhu Yuan Zhang had obtained elite troops, able generals, and many advisers under him. He also occupied Chuzhou, a strategic place where it could be used to launch attacks and was also easy to defend. But his sight was not limited to just the small Haozhou, not even Chuzhou. His sight was on the entire world.

This year, he was twenty six.

The last obstacle

The success of Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't seem to bring any luck to his father in law. Guo Zi Xing was now being bullied hard. Using today's words, it's public admonition. Every time there was a meeting, it was always four against one. Sun De Ya attempted a few times but considering that Zhu Yuan Zhang was not far off and it would be hard to deal with the consequence. Therefore he pushed Guo Zi Xing out from Haozhou and let him find his own way to live.

By now Guo Zi Xing understood the harshness of life. He didn't have any other choice but joining his son-in-law Zhu Yuan Zhang. But thinking of the ways he treated him, would he still treat him well?

Upon arriving at Chuzhou, his worries were eliminated. Zhu Yuan Zhang not only didn't dwell on the past strife, but also offered the position of commander-in-chief to him. What was more surprising, Zhu Yuan Zhang made a decision no one expected.

He decided to give his command of the thirty thousand troops directly under him to Guo Zi Xing. The position of the commander-in-chief was significant but it was just a nominal position. Giving up his command of the troops surprised everyone. Guo Zi Xing was deeply moved. Actually he never trusted his son in law and even thought about harming him. He asked Zhu Yuan Zhang, why did you treat me this way? Zhu Yuan Zhang replied in earnest. If there weren't you, there wouldn't be me of today. I cannot forget your benevolence and kindness.

Guo Zi Xing finally understood he was wrong and Zhu Yuan Zhang was right.

Upon receiving this news, those who originally wanted to kill Zhu Yuan Zhang admired him very much, among them, was the son of Guo Zi Xing, Guo Tian Xu.

If one wants to demonstrate his power, one must not rely on violence. Those who challenge this rule will certainly be eliminated from the rolls of the powerful ones in history. It has been like this ever since.

Guo Zi Xing brought thousands of his own men with him. Food in Chuzhou became insufficient. Zhu Yuan Zhang attacked Hezhou. Once he took it, he stayed there and yielded Chuzhou to Guo Zi Xing.

In the meantime, with more soldiers than provisions, Sun De Ya of Haozhou forced his way to Hezhou to ask for food. Zhu Yuan Zhang was dealing with this headache when he heard another piece of news, that Guo Zi Xing, upon learning that Sun De Ya came to here, also brought thousands here to fight Sun De Ya. The small city of Hezhou all of a sudden was crowded with tens of thousands of people. With the two antagonists meeting up here, a fight was to begin.

But there couldn't be a fight, why?

There were too many people. Hezhou was a small town. With tens of thousands poured in, in and out of the city everywhere was packed with people. This is just like the tourist attractions during the golden holiday week[12]. It's hard even to turn your body, not to mention to fight.

If they couldn't fight, they'd better talk.

It seemed Sun De Ya was reasonable. He indicated he was an outsider and would be willing to leave. Zhu Yuan Zhang immediately went to him to send him off. Sun De Ya was inside the city and his soldiers were outside of the city, accompanied by Zhu Yuan Zhang. But no one expected there was someone else prepared to take action.

It was Guo Zi Xing, who was not about to be reasonable. He only remembered he was humiliated many times by Sun De Ya. He didn't care about his reputation anymore. When he saw Sun De Ya didn't have many soldiers with him, he ordered his troops to get Sun De Ya arrested, which put Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was outside of the city, in jeopardy.

When Sun De Ya's soldiers heard their commander-in-chief had been arrested, they thought this was under the order of Zhu Yuan Zhang. At the same time Zhu Yuan Zhang also received the news. The situation was tense. Zhu Yuan Zhang saw the scene was not good, he turned back his horse. The soldiers were prepared. They looped iron chains on Zhu Yuan Zhang's head. Please come down, will you? Sun De Ya's soldiers arrested Zhu Yuan Zhang

[12] May 1st and October 1st are two major Chinese national holidays. Most of the people are given the entire week of the days around the holiday off. Because of the length of time, people take the opportunities to travel to popular tourist attractions. With the onrush of so many people all at the same time, the tourist attractions are usually packed with people and many times more crowded than the most downtowns of big cities. These two weeks are therefore dubbed golden holiday week.

and went to negotiate with Guo Zi Xing.

Guo Zi Xing was drinking while enjoying the facial expressions of Sun De Ya. Suddenly news arrived, Zhu Yuan Zhang had been arrested. He was completely shocked. For sure he didn't want to let Sun De Ya go. But he also couldn't be without Zhu Yuan Zhang. He had no choice but to release the prisoner.

But there arose another problem. Who was to be released first? At this moment, Xu Da came forward. He would be willing to use himself to exchange for Zhu Yuan Zhang. Once Zhu Yuan Zhang came back, Sun De Ya would be released. After Sun De Ya went back, Xu Da would be released. This sounds like doggerel. What a troublesome matter.

The problem was finally resolved. But Guo Zi Xing lost his enemy when he was already in the palms of his hands. He couldn't swallow the setback and fell ill from anxiety. Then he died one month later. We can see that a man without an open mind won't be able to do big things.

Yet for Zhu Yuan Zhang, this was not bad news. He did all he could to be generous and dutiful. He now had his hands untied and was ready to act. Real undertakings were waiting for him.

Chapter Six

Beginning of the Imperial Cause

Hezhou was too small.

Zhu Yuan Zhang recognized this pressing problem. In this small town he couldn't do much. He turned his eyes to Jiqing (present day Nanjing).

Superstition was a common disease of the people of imperial times. To take over the world, one must occupy the place where there was imperial aura. Nanjing was considered such a place. Mt Sapphire lays north-south ward like a huge submerged dragon. Whereas the Stone Mountain, like a crouching tiger, sharply rises above the Yangtze River. This is the origin of Nanjing's epithet, Crawling Dragon and Crouching Tiger. In addition, in front of Nanjing there is the Yangtze River. Emperors were like us, before they bought a house, they wanted to observe the Feng Shui. Nanjing, with its back against a mountain and front facing the water, had its Feng Shui rated high through the roof. Before Ming, there were already six dynasties made it their capitals here. At the time of the Yuan dynasty, this place was called Road Jiqing. Not only was it strategically located and hard to access, it was rather wealthy as well.

The surrounding areas were not only important grain producing regions, they also acted as the commercial hubs. The important thing was there was also the advantage of having access to the Great Canal. In those times when it would take months to travel from Beijing to Nanjing, water ways were really important.

Feng Guo Sheng (Feng Sheng) was a man not only brave in battles, but also very foresighted. He suggested to Zhu Yuan Zhang to immediately cross the Yangtze River and occupy Jiqing. The suggestion deeply moved Zhu Yuan Zhang. He made the decision to take Jiqing.

But where were the ships? Everything Zhu Yuan Zhang had were cavalry and foot soldiers and he was missing a navy. When he was most anxious, the arrival of a man brought him a solution.

The man's name was Yu Tong Hai. In *The Official History of Ming*, he was described as a

naval commander. In reality this man was a pirate who pirated along the Yangtze River. What he did usually was like those described in the novel *Tales of the Marsh*. His indecent job was to "bring you over to the middle of the river and ask you if you want to eat knifed noodles or meat dumplings."

But to Zhu Yuan Zhang, he became a valuable person. Killing or robbing people were of no concern as long as he was useful.

Thus he collected a thousand warships and attacked Caishi first. Then he took Taiping, and then eventually arrived at the final destination, Jiqing.

These so-called warships were actually just small fishing boats. Navy, the vital deficiency existed in Zhu Yuan Zhang's force, would later become a major limiting factor in his military combat strategies.

Jiqing was right in front of him!

At this time Zhu Yuan Zhang was the left vice marshal of the rebel army. Guo Tian Xu was the commanding marshal. Guo Zi Xing's brother in law Zhang Tian You was the right vice marshal. The titles were awarded by Liu Fu Tong. Zhu Yuan Zhang ranked the lowest among the three. But obviously the other two really didn't have the strength to be a match against Zhu Yuan Zhang. The actual commander-in-chief of the army was Zhu Yuan Zhang. At this time the Yuan rulers were already suffering from headaches, rebel armies were everywhere and they didn't have the time to deal with the little Zhu Yuan Zhang. Taking this opportunity, Zhu Yuan Zhang launched his final assault on Jiqing.

Because the boats were of low qualities and they underestimated the defense of Jiqing, two assaults on Jiqing in August and September of year fifteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1355) were defeated by the Yuan army. But the defeats were not necessarily a bad thing for Zhu Yuan Zhang because in these two battles, both Guo Tian Xu and Zhang Tian You were killed in battle. Zhu Yuan Zhang naturally became the commanding marshal.

The next year (AD 1356), Zhu Yuan Zhang personally led the troops in three columns to attack Jiqing. It took him ten days to take Jiqing and he renamed Jiqing to Yingtian.

The pauper Zhu Yuan Zhang finally got himself out of Fengyang, Haozhou, and Chuzhou. He came to the wealthy Nanjing. But the real business had just begun. Keep on with the work!

Tough neighbors

Zhu Yuan Zhang occupied Yingtian, which was a good thing for him. But historical trends indicated that his situation was not optimistic. Since ancient times the ones who occupied the north had the geographical advantages. China's terrains slant from north to south. There were

very few instances of those who campaigned northward from the south and achieved final victories.

But at the time when Zhu Yuan Zhang occupied Yingtian, he gained a huge advantage.

Let's take a look at Zhu Yuan Zhang's neighbors. Living east of him was the Yuan Army in Zhenjiang. Living southeast of him was Zhang Shi Cheng in Pingjiang (present day city of Suzhou). In northeast of him was Zhang Ming Jian's rebel army. To the south was the Yuan General Bashirebuwa (a rather peculiar name). To his west was Xu Shou Hui.

Ostensibly, the neighbors of Zhu Yuan Zhang were all more powerful than him. They all occupied large areas. Zhu Yuan Zhang was surrounded by them, like a peasant labor working far from his hometown, relying on others for shelter. Although the neighbors didn't like Zhu Yuan Zhang, precisely because he was weak, no one paid too much attention to him. They fought among themselves and didn't have the time to bother him.

More importantly, at Zhu Yuan Zhang's north was Neighbor Liu Fu Tong. This was a brotherly army, which shielded Zhu Yuan Zhang from Yuan army's attacks. The Yuan rulers took note of Zhu Yuan Zhang but couldn't reach him. There was the situation that those who could fight didn't want to fight but those who wanted to fight couldn't fight.

Zhu Yuan Zhang took full advantage of this particular situation. For him, the Yuan dynasty was the target of his boundless hatred and revenge. But the time was not right. First he needed to take care of his two neighbors. For him, the two neighbors were the real frightening adversaries.

Next we will introduce his two neighbors. Their names were Zhang Shi Cheng and Chen You Liang.

Chapter Seven

The Dreadful Enemies

These two were both outstanding men of the time. If they appeared separately in different eras, both should have made great achievements. Alas, history was deemed to be a little bit noisy for this time.

This was a game of elimination. Only the one who hung on to the end would win.

Based on Gu Kai Zhi's[13] theory on eating sugar canes, we introduce the weaker one first:

Zhang Shi Cheng, male, was born in 1321 in Taizhou. His profession was salt smuggling. Here we need to first say something about salt smuggling, a trade that existed for a long time in imperial times. Salt was a material controlled by the state and could not be traded without permission. But the sea water was out there, wasted if not used and the salt produced was wasted if not sold. Many people recognized this was a path toward wealth.

According to economic theories, monopoly will inevitably result in the degeneration and bureaucracies in the industry. Ancient salt industry was of no exception. Ordinary people could buy better private salt that cost less than one third of the salt sold by the state. To strictly control the profits of this industry, every imperial government from Han, Wei, North and South dynasties, Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties and Ten Nations, Song, and Yuan, regardless of their ideologies, be they Taoism, Confucianism, or Legalism, all followed the theories of Han Fei Zi[14] on the handling this problem.

The theory dictated: if people knew they would face the death penalty but they still chose to pan gold in the rivers, then they were playing with their lucks, more severe punishments were required.

More severe penalties for selling private salt were increasingly applied. At the time of Sui and Tang, the penalty for selling one dan (about one hundred jins)[15] of private salt was death.

[13] Gu Kai Zhi was a Chinese painter and calligrapher of Jin dynasty.
[14] Han Fei Zi was an ancient Chinese philosopher and one of the founders of Legalism.
[15] Dan and jin were old Chinese weight units. One dan was about one hundred jins. One jin was about 500 grams in today's weight.

We all know Cheng Yao Jing[16] was a private salt dealer. If we look at his body shape, he should have sold more than one hundred jins of salt. But he was pardoned and released, which is very puzzling.

Then the personalities of Zhang Shi Cheng should be clear. First, he must be someone who wasn't afraid of death. Whoever was afraid of death wouldn't have been in such a business. In addition, he must be a relatively rich man. A rich man could make many friends. Last, his hatred toward the rule of Yuan must have etched into his bones, because this government didn't allow him to sell private salt and also executed many of his friends.

In year thirteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1353), Zhang Shi Cheng started his rebellion in Taizhou. He was a salt merchant and most of his rebel brothers were also in this business. He didn't belong to the Army of the Red Scarf, which consisted mainly of poor peasants. This difference sowed the seed for his long running confrontation with Zhu Yuan Zhang.

As one of the rebels at the time, Zhang Shi Cheng established his position in history through an extremely tough battle.

The toughest battle – the battle of Gaoyou

In year thirteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1353), right after Zhang Shi Cheng started his rebellion, in succession he attacked and took Taizhou, Xinghua, and a few other places. He chose Gaoyou as his capital city, declared himself a king, named his dynasty Great Zhou, and titled his reign Heaven Blessed.

In hind sight, Heaven Blessed was really a well-chosen name.

Before Zhang Shi Cheng had sat in his throne for long, Yuan dispatched troops to attack him. The Yuan officials were very stubborn. They would attack whoever declared himself a king. If someone simply rebelled without being declared a king, they would not touch him, which contributed to Zhu Yuan Zhang's advantage.

As we previously stated, Toto, Yuan's famous minister, led an army of one million men (note, this is a real number) to attack Gaoyou. It was noted as "there had never been an army this numerous" (*The Official History of Yuan*). At this moment, the private salt dealer Zhang Shi Cheng showed his courage and resolve.

At the time many people suggested to abandon Gaoyou. Zhang Shi Cheng thought for a long time, and then said: "where else can we go?"

Right, where else to go?

[16] Cheng Yao Jin was one of the generals who helped to found the Tang dynasty.

If we have to die, then let us die right here!

The Yuan army utilized all sorts of weapons, including various kinds of cannon, to attack the city. Zhang Shi Cheng and two of his younger brothers Zhang Shi Yi and Zhang Shi De stayed on the ramparts to fight. All the officers and soldiers could see the silhouettes of them. More importantly, there was a belief in the rebels' hearts.

They'd die if they surrendered and they'd die if they resisted. They preferred to die resisting, by that, at least they could die in glory!

Thanks to this spirit, the seemingly weak and small city of Gaoyou resisted the Yuan army of a million men for three months. This was the power of daring to die.

Right at the moment when Gaoyou was about to be taken, issues surfaced inside the Yuan government.

In past history books, we have always seen many treacherous officials, who cared only about themselves and not the country, like Qin Hui and Jia Si Dao[17], who are the objects of hatred by everyone. They always at the most critical moments did things that ruined their countries. Actually, in governments of the minority races, such treacherous officials also existed and could also carry out the same deeds.

What followed was just the usual stuff. An insidious official lobbied the emperor. The emperor then became concerned the general in the field could mutiny. Then the emperor ordered the general to return immediately. Thus Toto withdrew from Gaoyou. Gone were also his efforts to save the Yuan Dynasty.

Heaven blessed at the critical time. The name was certainly well chosen. But if there wasn't the three months resistance, there would not be the final victory. What decided the fate of Zhang Shi Cheng was not his reign title, but his courage.

After this battle, Zhang Shi Cheng's name became known to the world. He seized on the momentum and went on to occupy the rich regions of the Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. He became the richest man, despite his territories were not the largest (deserving for a man who was a private salt merchant).

But thereafter, Zhang Shi Cheng changed. He, who did only small businesses, suddenly came into possession of the richest territories of the country, and he never had to sell salt again. He had money and houses. He had flour buns in his hands. If he wanted to sprinkle cane sugar on it he could get cane sugar. If he wanted to sprinkle it with brown sugar, he could get brown sugar.

[17] Qin Hui and Jia Si Dao were officials of Southern Song, who insisted on negotiations with the northern invaders.

Zhu Yuan Zhang had an accurate assessment on him, no aspirations.

This man indeed didn't have great aspirations. But he was truly a good person, a very good person. He was a man of few words and treated people generously. He waived the taxes in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions. People in those areas recognized his generosity and built many temples in his name. But his generosity and lack of determination was only enough to distinguish him as a hero and not enough to make him a ruthless and fierce leader.

The one we will introduce next was a real ruthless and fierce leader.

But before we introduce him, we need to introduce his former boss, Xu Shou Hui.

Xu Shou Hui, whose date of birth is unknown (his date of death was rather accurate), was a native of Luotian of Hubei province. He was a fabric dealer. It was said that the young man was rather handsome and upright toward others, and he was said to be the most handsome man in Luotian. Because he was often taken advantage of by Yuan officials, he was discontent toward Yuan. In year eleven of Utmost Justice (AD 1351), Liu Fu Tong went by his hometown. Xu Shou Hui's long accumulated rage finally couldn't be suppressed anymore. He prepared to rebel. His method was again using ancient superstitions, this time it was Mingism.

To spread his propaganda, he found two helpers. One of them was Zou Pu Sheng (a local honcho), a blacksmith from Macheng. The other was Peng Ying Yu (we should be familiar with him), a monk from Jiangxi province. After evangelizing Mingism for several months, he started the rebellion in the Dabie Mountain region and took Luotian at once. His force was a branch of the Army of Red Scarfs, and they wore red scarfs as well. The rebels fought continuously and took Huangzhou and Xishui. Eventually the city of Xishui was chosen as the capital.

The title of his empire, Tianwan (not the title of reign)[18], is worth mentioning and it can be said it was the most peculiar one in history. How did that title come about? I invite everyone to play a word game with me. Remove the top strokes from the words Tian and Wan, and you can see the words become Da Yuan[19]. The fabric dealer was too concerned that his imperial title couldn't suppress that of the Yuan Dynasty's, thus he came up with this stinky idea, which gave him only advantages in words. Every time I see this title I get the feeling that it means that it'll finish in a few days[20].

At the time the territory occupied by Xu Shou Hui was very small. It consisted of only the regions of Huangzhou and Xishui. But his organization was extravagant. He had all the departments of the Yuan government. His whole force was only a few thousand, but he set up

[18] Literally it carries dubious meanings. It can mean Perfected by Heaven or Destined to End.
[19] Great Yuan.
[20] The Chinese word 'wan' can mean perfect, complete, death, finish, and end.

the House of the Commander-in-Chief, the Secretariat, Military Intelligence and Imperial Guard, and the Six Ministries. No one knows if he had soldiers. By all estimates they all became officials. He had Zou Pu Sheng as the imperial grand tutor and Ni Wen Jun as the commander-in-chief. At the same time, another man also joined his army. This man's appearance was unusual and was excellent at handwriting. He was Chen You Liang.

The formidable Chen You Liang

Among all those late Yuan rebels, many leaders weren't able to resist the attacks of Yuan's sugar coated bullets. Many surrendered in exchange for amnesty. Even Zhu Yuan Zhang secretly communicated with Yuan. This man was the only one who was against the rule of the foreign Yuan. He did what he said, never withered and never gave up. He stuck to the end. He was a damned good man!

Chen You Liang, male, was born in AD 1320. His original surname was Xie. His was a fisherman. His was from Mianyang (present day's Xiantao of Hubei province). He once was a county clerk. When Xu Shou Hui's rebel army came to his hometown, he joined. Because he was very literate and smart, he quickly won the trusts of Xu Shou Hui and that of Ni Wen Jun, the prime minister.

In year thirteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1353), Xu Shou Hui declared himself the emperor (too foolish to recognize the situation). The Yuan rulers called up troops from several provinces to attack Xu Shou Hui from all sides. The capital city was taken and Peng Ying Yu died in battle. Only now did Xu Shou Hui wake up. He and his troops withdrew to the Huangmei region of Hubei province to fight a guerrilla war. He also reorganized his army. Thereafter the Army of the Red Scarfs counter attacked, retook Jiangxi and Hunan, chose the city of Hanyang (present day's Town of Hanyang in the city of Wuhan) as the new capital, and changed the reign title to Eternal Peace.

The method to reorganize his troops by Xu Shou Hui during that time was really awesome. He wrote the word "Buddha" on the backs of every soldier and told them this would provide immunity against knives and spears. The lie seemed to be easy to prove untrue because soldiers found it not to be true once there were on the battle fields (if you are not convinced, then try having a spear thrust against you). The lie had a second part. If you unfortunately die in action, it was not because the word didn't work, but because you weren't a true believer. In other words, if you didn't die, that's because I wrote the word. But if you died, you should only blame yourself. Who made you into a non-believer?

This kind of catch-22 like ridiculous logic was very popular at the time. His soldiers all recited the Buddhist scriptures before going into battle. This puzzled the Yuan government

forces. They thought they ran into monks.

On the opposite were his generals. These men were not easy to deal with. They were all first class famous generals, who were the so-called Xu Shou Hui's Four Heavenly Kings. They were Zou Pu Sheng (commander-in-chief), Ding Pu Lang (a madman, explained later), Zhao Pu Sheng (unstoppable with his pair of knives), and Fu You De (who never suffered a defeat). The four led the troops, swept through the Yuan armies, and established the Tianwan regime.

In Xu Shou Hui's army, brotherhood was of the utmost importance. If someone betrayed a brother, he would be despised and punished by everyone. This kind of organization easily reminded us the famous Gang of Hong Xing[21]. But if someone valued brotherhood, then there must also be someone that didn't. There has been no exception ever in history.

Prime Minister Ni Wen Jun was this kind of man. He had always been alongside with Xu Shou Hui. He knew that except a handsome face, the man didn't have any exceptional talents. But he was well read and good at literature and arms. Yet he was under Xu Shou Hui. Therefore he plotted to murder Xu Shou Hui and usurp the throne. But his plot was exposed. He had no recourse but to escape via Hanyang to Huangzhou, because Huangzhou was Chen You Liang's home base.

Ni Wen Jun always trusted Chen You Liang. He was not only Chen You Liang's superior, but also promoted Chen You Liang and made him a senior officer in the army. He could claim himself as his teacher.

But he forgot one of the old Chinese sayings: A teacher brings up students of the same sort.

What kind of person was Chen You Liang? He can be described in eight words: black hearted, heavy handed, irresponsibly audacious, and contemptuously reckless. Judging by what he did later, there really wasn't anything that he dared not to do. Others valued brotherhood above all. He valued brotherhood like dog poop.

If others were afraid of killing superiors or brothers, he did them without hesitation. After he did something, he even admitted and boasted. I did it, what can you do to me?

To analyze this man, we need to start from his childhood. He was originally a fisherman, and the fisherman of the lowest class. This kind of fishermen usually didn't go ashore. They lived on the boat. Villagers didn't deal with them because they always had the fishy odor inseparable from their bodies. Chen You Liang grew up in this kind of environment.

He had been looked down on and derided by others since childhood. People shunned and stared at him upon seeing them, which made him feeling inferior deep in his heart. If he wanted to change himself, he could rely on only himself!

[21] A powerful gang organization that was famous in early twentieth century Shanghai.

He studied hard and finally got a job at the county government as a clerk. But the job didn't bring him any dignity. Those who looked down on him still looked down on him. The oft heard low murmurs and chatters made him crazy.

So, even being literate didn't change his status. After a long contemplation, Chen You Liang seemed to have found a way for others to respect him.

Climb up and never stop climbing up, until reaching at the apex. Those who looked down on me eventually will lower their heads before me.

When Xu Shou Hui's rebel army came to his hometown, Chen You Liang, the Yuan government's civil servant, joined the rebellion. He aimed the head of his spear toward Yuan that paid his salary. The motive for him to join the rebellion was obviously different from those of the poor peasants. The motive was a sign indicating that in Chen You Liang's heart, there was no trust and loyalty.

In his mind, the only important thing was power and status, which would put him high above others so that nobody could dare to look down upon him!

Among what Chen You Liang had learned, The *Four Books and Five Classics*, as well as other history and classical works were all not important. What he learned the best were these philosophical believes: to keep a secret a man must be killed, to remove grass the root must be removed, and one must not be merciful to be a man. *The Art of Black and Thick*[22] should also be his specialty, which was also what Ni Wen Jun appreciated. But he would never have thought one day Chen You Liang would use this specialty on him.

Ni Wen Jun, disgraced and humiliated, fled to Chen You Liang, who nonetheless received him with cordiality and prepared a room and change clothe for him. He conversed with him, which made Ni Wen Jun feel that he was not mistaken in his choice of friends. He revealed all the secrets. The more he told, the angrier he became. He dropped tears. Chen You Liang looked at him and asked a critical question:

"How are Zhao Pu Sheng and others?"

Upon hearing this question, Ni Wen Jun felt even more sadness rising from his heart. "You should know those people. They are all Xu Shou Hui's diehard followers. But, if we join hands, we can defeat them."

Well, this is enough and I don't need to ask more.

One day later, Xu Shou Hui in Hanyang received Ni Wen Jun' severed head.

[22] A literary work of the early years of Republic of China, using historical figures as examples to criticize contemporary unethical behaviors in Chinese traditions.

Chapter Eight

The Dreadful Chen You Liang

Chen You Liang, after killing Ni Wen Jun, became the top official of the Empire of Tianwan for his service in salvaging the empire. He thus was able to fully exploit his capabilities. He knew his men and was very good at organizing them. More exceptionally, he was a man capable of commanding troops.

Liu Bang, the Supreme Grandfather of Han, once asked Han Xin[23] how many troops he would be able to command. Han Xin told him he would be able to command up to one hundred thousand. This shows it's not necessarily good to have more soldiers. The key is who commands them and how to use them. Chen You Liang's capability far exceeded the capacity for commanding one hundred thousand soldiers.

Comparing to him, Xu Shou Hui was far worse. This man was indeed a nice person. But aside from being nice, he wasn't anything else. Every day when Chen You Liang saw him sitting in the throne, he became incensed. "How come this bum sits up there and I have to receive instructions from him?" When this idea came up more and more frequently, it transformed from an idea in the mind into action.

It was easy to remove Xu Shou Hui. But before that those of his Mingist brothers must be eliminated. The first one was Zhao Pu Sheng.

Soon after, Zhao Pu Sheng was killed for guilty of treason. Ding Pu Lang and Fu You De were no idiots. They saw the situation was bad. They left and went to work for Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Xu Shou Hui now became a veritable commander-in-chief of one and a pawn in the hands of Chen You Liang. Thus almost in all history books there was a strange description: In year twenty of Utmost Justice (AD 1360), Xu Shou Hui, as a hostage of Chen You Liang's, attacked Zhu Yuan Zhang.

For one attacking someone as a hostage of another, being an emperor like that was no

[23] Han Xin was the top general who helped Liu Bang to create the Han Dynasty.

better than dead.

Xu Shou Hui didn't want to die. He yielded his power to Chen You Liang and hoped to remain alive.

Chen You Liang belonged to a kind of people who "can't tolerate that someone is sleeping in the same bed". He was not going to give Xu Shou Hui a pass.

The day finally came. On June 16 of year twenty of Utmost Justice (AD 1360) (a very precise date), riding on the current of the Yangtze River, Chen You Liang led one hundred thousand troops to attack Caishi, which was occupied by Zhu Yuan Zhang. He invited Xu Shou Hui to worship the gods at the Temple of Five Ways in the city of Caishi. Xu Shou Hui was always very enthusiastic about these sorts of activities and he came to the temple.

When he came to the temple, Chen You Liang was standing in front of the window. There were two body guards next to him. It was raining heavily outside.

Chen You Liang didn't utter anything to him. Xu Shou Hui felt somewhat embarrassed. He walked to Chen You Liang and said in a flattery tone: "we are about to take Yingtian, all these should be attributed to your efforts."

Chen You Liang didn't turn his head. He only said drily: "unfortunately, you are not going to see that day".

Xu Shou Hui was flabbergasted. He had thought such a day would come. But when it came, it was so cruel.

The two stopped talking.

It was deathly silent.

Xu Shou Hui was dropping sweats and tears. The terror in his heart was like a big hand dragging him down into the abyss.

"I'll yield the throne to you. I can be a ministerial assistance. How does this sound?"

Chen You Liang finally turned his head. His looked at Xu Shou Hui and his eyes emitted beams of unbelieve. He uttered the last words that Xu Shou Hui would hear in his life, "How have you survived in this chaotic world?"

A guard came up and smashed Xu Shou Hui's head with a hammer.

Xu Shou Hui fell and what he saw for the last time was the cold eyes of Chen You Liang.

The guards washed off the blood stains of the former boss. They decorated the basilica because the coronation of the new emperor will be performed here.

On June 16 of year twenty of Utmost Justice (AD 1360), in a thunderstorm, Chen You Liang

declared himself emperor at the Temple of Five Ways. The name of his empire was Han.

This is the way to survive in a chaotic world, Xu Shou Hui, you didn't understand.

Chen You Liang was a complete and ruthless man who didn't value morality and rectitude, but he was a man of daring deeds. The reign year title of the Empire of Han was Great Rectitude.

Indeed, without scruple, a man who killed his emperor and took the throne would dare to title the reign year Great Rectitude. This sent another message to us. This was a man who wouldn't follow the rules of the game. In his eyes, all ideas about mercy and morality were dog farts. Mr. Moralists, if you despise the acts of emperor killing, then I'll show you what I'm going to do, I'll title my reign year Great Rectitude!

Of course this was a man that was not easy to deal with. To deal with such a man, it would require more than just being virtuous and following the rules.

Who would be able to deal with such a dreadful man?

It seemed that Zhu Yuan Zhang would be the only one.

After Zhu Yuan Zhang took Yingtian, both Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng recognized the potential of this adversary. They both were extremely smart men. They all knew who posed the biggest threat to them. Although Zhu Yuan Zhang was small and weak, he couldn't be neglected.

But Chen You Liang at the time didn't have control of the Empire of Tianwan yet. The first one that confronted Zhu Yuan Zhang was Zhang Shi Cheng. The two sides had fought for no fewer than a hundred battles since year sixteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1356) after Zhu Yuan Zhang took Yingtian. He was deeply troubled by Zhang Shi Cheng. I am only occupying some land, why do you always have issues with me? But, like when the roof leaked, there were always heavy rains. Zhu Yuan Zhang's army was already stretched to the limit. In June of that year, a unit commander of Zhu Yuan Zhang's defected to Zhang Shi Cheng. At that moment Zhu Yuan Zhang made a critical decision.

He wanted to negotiate with Zhang Shi Cheng. He wrote to Zhang and basically said: I am just a poor peasant and you are a salt dealer. We are all suffering. Why do you want to attack me? Let us co-exist peacefully. Wouldn't it be better if we can visit each other like neighbors from time to time?

Zhu Yuan Zhang did this because he was fighting with Xu Shou Hui. Fighting on two fronts was very bad for him. But Zhang Shi Cheng was not an ordinary guy. He saw Zhu Yuan Zhang's plan. He replied to Zhu Yuan Zhang, which basically said: Go back to where you came from. I have an agreement with Xu Shou Hui. We must destroy you.

Well, if we can't negotiate, then let's fight.

In July of the same year, Zhang Shi Cheng launched a large scale assault on Zhenjiang, which was controlled by Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was well prepared. He ordered his elite generals Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun to meet the attack. They defeated Zhang's army in Longtan. Then the pugnacious general Chang Yu Chun attacked all the way through and took Changzhou next year (AD 1357). In the battle to take Ningguo, Chang Yu Chun fully inherited the spirit of Xiahou Dun[24], who wouldn't quit the battle even wounded. He was shot three times (through the body) and he kept fighting and took Ningguo. Zhang Shi Cheng was completely routed.

Actually Zhang Shi Cheng's army was not of inferior quality and numbered more than Zhu Yuan Zhang's army. But still, he was thoroughly defeated. From this we can conclude it's easy to raise an army of a thousand but it's not easy to find a good general.

Chang Yu Chun

Chang Yu Chun hadn't followed Zhu Yuan Zhang for long. He just joined Zhu Yuan Zhang in year fifteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1355) when Zhu Yuan Zhang took Hezhou. Although he was late he was not modest. He said he joined to be the vanguard and asked for the seal.

Zhu Yuan Zhang had seen many arrogant men but never so blunt like this one. He was angry and said: You are a refugee who barely can feed yourself. You are here to have something to eat. How can I give you such a position (from *The Chronicles of Ming*)? Chang Yu Chun smiled: You wait and see.

His actions proved his capabilities.

In the battle to take Caishi, the Yuan army took positions by the river bank. Zhu Yuan Zhang's navy could not get near. They were frustrated but they couldn't do anything. At this moment, Chang Yu Chun's boat came by. Zhu Yuan Zhang recalled what he said, so he said to Chang Yu Chun: Boy, don't you want to be a vanguard, now it's the time! Upon hearing this, Chang Yu Chun lunged forward. By just himself, he rode a horse with a spear in his hand and thrashed his long spear toward the Yuan army. The Yuan army received and held his long spear. But they couldn't imagine this was exactly Chang Yu Chun wanted. He held the spear

[24] Xiahou Dun was a general of Cao Cao in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He once got one of his eyes shot by an arrow. But he didn't flinch one bit. Instead, he pulled the arrow out, which still had his eyeball attached. Seeing this (from his other eye), he ate the eyeball from the tip of the arrow and galloped full speed ahead and killed the enemy that just shot him. This story is well known to Chinese readers, thus the author is referencing it without mentioning the details.

and jumped over onto the river bank (this seems like a pole vault). He killed several men and opened a beach head. The soldiers followed and they took Caishi.

After this battle, Zhu Yuan Zhang had a fresh look at the young man named Chang Yu Chun and personally awarded him the seal of the vanguard of the office of the commander-in-chief.

Chang Yu Chun was a natural born vanguard. He was good at using cavalry to attack. His choice of attack position was accurate and he was cool headed in assessing the situations of the battlefield. Besides these, he was also a master of martial arts. His personal fighting skills were exceptional. This advantage was fully utilized later.

But he also had a fatal weakness. He was thirsty for killing and his killing was one of the most immoral kind. He killed prisoners.

Ancients said: “killing prisoners is ominous”. From a moral point of view, the enemy has surrendered and further actions against him are not graceful. But he rather enjoyed this. This habit also caused some big troubles for Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Chapter Nine

The Inevitable Showdown

Having defeated Zhang Shi Cheng, Zhu Yuan Zhang's attention was now mainly on Xu Shou Hui. But he understood his real enemy was not the superficial Xu Shou Hui, but the giant shadow behind him, Chen You Liang.

During this time, Zhu Yuan Zhang made two decisions that enabled him to become the final victor of the war. His first decision was to build up the defenses, store up provisions, and delay declaration of kingship. It was this decision that allowed him to escape the attentions of the public. When the heads of other peasant rebel leaders were bloated with the thoughts of becoming emperors and kings, sheepish but eager to put on wolf's clothing, and dared to claim to be able to feed thousands when they had just ounces of rice in the cooker, Zhu Yuan Zhang took full advantage of the time and continuously developed his strength.

The other decision was about on whom, between Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng, he would first use his knife. At the time everyone thought Zhang Shi Cheng was weak and looked forward to dealing with him first. He could then use the occupied territories of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces to expand their own force. Afterwards he would fight a decisive battle against Chen You Liang. It would be fair to say the strategy was correct regardless how one looked at it. But this was the moment when Zhu Yuan Zhang demonstrated his genius in his strategic vision.

In making a decision, it's very difficult for one not to be influenced by others, particularly when the others are a majority. When many are saying the same thing, most people will follow the majority and even change their own views. But Zhu Yuan Zhang's wisdom showed truth is often on the side of the few.

Zhu Yuan Zhang told his advisors: What you see make sense. But you fail in seeing the crux of the issue. Zhang Shi Cheng's personality makes him short sighted. Chen You Liang's personality makes him arrogant. A short sighted man can't see far and an arrogant man is fond of making troubles. If I attack Chen You Liang, Zhang Shi Cheng is not going to help him. But if I attack Zhang Shi Cheng, Chen You Liang is going to mobilize his whole force to help. If

that happens, I'll have to fight on two fronts. The results will be unpredictable.

Brilliant! Truly Brilliant!

Having a vision like this, if he was not the man that took the country, who else!

Prelude to the big battle

Regardless how they tried to avoid it, the day of a showdown would eventually come. Both Zhu Yuan Zhang and Chen You Liang recognized this.

In year nineteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1359), Chen You Liang took complete control of the Empire of Tianwan. He had more troops, who were better trained than those of Zhu Yuan Zhang's. More importantly, his strength, the navy, was exactly Zhu Yuan Zhang's weakness.

Chen You Liang occupied Hubei and Jiangxi provinces. That is, he was at the upstream of the Yangtze River, whereas Yingtian, which was occupied by Zhu Yuan Zhang, was at the downstream. Zhu Yuan Zhang had to fight up against the flow. Because they were on the same waterway, naval battle was an unavoidable form of fight, which was the very reason that again and again Zhu Yuan Zhang tried to avoid the showdown.

Although Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't know physics, he knew that riding in a fishing boat to fight a warship would be just like committing a suicide.

Then an incident that Zhu Yuan Zhang never anticipated brought forth the showdown.

In November of year nineteen of Utmost Justice (AD 1359), Chang Yu Chun attacked and took Chizhou. Chen You Liang was shocked and made preparations to retake the city. But the information was not well kept and Zhu Yuan Zhang learned of it and ordered Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun to set up an ambush. Chang Yu Chun and Xu Da ambushed and defeated Chen You Liang's army at the foothills of Mt Jiuhua. They also took three thousand prisoners.

Now, Chang Yu Chun's bad habit came back. He said to Xu Da: I'm going to kill them. Xu Da adamantly disagreed and indicated he was going to report to Zhu Yuan Zhang. But he could not imagine the appalling impudence of Chang Yu Chun, who dared to bury all the three thousand alive immediately without even asking for an order.

Chang Yu Chun had his purpose for killing the prisoners. He kept a few alive, released them, and told them to go back to send a message to Chen You Liang:

I am Chang Yu Chun and I've beaten you!

Now he was in a big trouble.

Cheng You Liang's fury

Chen You Liang was completely enraged. Ever since he joined the rebellion, no one had dared to bully him anymore. Everyone always cowered in front of him. Who the hell is Chang Yu Chun and dares to challenge me!

He finally decided to act. This time it wouldn't be just small skirmishes. He would fight all the way to Yingtian and send Zhu Yuan Zhang back to his farm!

Of course this was not Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to see.

This time Chang Yu Chun really got the wolf's attention.

In year twenty of Utmost Justice, Chen You Liang and the most powerful fleet in the country marched toward Yingtian. The names of his warships were very impressive and they should be described in detail here. The names were The Vagrant River Dragon, The River Blocker, The Mountain Upsetter, The River and Sea Turtle, and etc. What seemed to be missing is The Heaven Breaker.

The names were impressive and the ships themselves were also formidable. Most of them were as tall as three store buildings and equipped with all kinds of guns and cannon. If Zhu Yuan Zhang's fishing boats were used against them, then they wouldn't need to attack with fire arms, they could just ram the boats.

Chen You Liang informed Zhang Shi Cheng before he launched his attack and asked him to join the attack. Then he ordered his formidable fleet to set out for Yingtian at lightning speed.

Chen You Liang's way of conducting battles was very unique. The man seemed having no interest in detailed planning. He was arbitrary and fought at wherever a fight could be fought. This peculiarity has always been a target of criticism by military experts. But fairly speaking, this was what made his way of fighting unique and it was also the very essence of his techniques in military commands.

If he didn't know where to attack, how could his enemy know? When someone got an opponent who wouldn't deal the cards the usual way, who could resist him? Zhu Yuan Zhang had to suffer.

When Zhu Yuan Zhang learned of the attack by the huge army led by Chen You Liang, Chen You Liang already took Caishi, a key military post. His speed awed Zhu Yuan Zhang. Now, Taiping, the most important barrier of Yingtian had to face Chen You Liang's army of one hundred thousand alone. Because no one thought Chen's Han army could have advanced so fast, in the city there were only three thousand soldiers, commanded by Hua Yun. Chen You Liang demonstrated the awesome power of his fleet in the battle for Taiping.

He didn't order the troops to attack the walls. He let the soldiers move the ships next to the city walls by the river. The soldiers easily climbed up the parapets using short ladders and at once annihilated the three thousand defenders. When Chen You Liang's Han army came down from the parapets, the defenders didn't even have time to react and could only stupidly watch the Han soldiers. They could not comprehend how these men could have come over the walls that were so high and enhanced by the river as the natural barrier. Could these men have flown over?

Taiping was over run and Yingtian now lay naked and was exposed to the sharp sword of Chen You Liang, who already killed Xu Shou Hui and became an emperor. Now his only target was the very vulnerable Zhu Yuan Zhang, who had only a navy of ten thousand.

The country is already in my hands!

It seemed that Heaven was giving up on Zhu Yuan Zhang. Regardless how to look at it, he had no hope to win. Every time he saw the dilapidated fishing boats on Lake Xuanwu, he had an impulse to set these boats on fire and destroy them.

But things can always take a turn. Not long before Chen You Liang's army moved north east[25], Heaven sent him an awesome gift. The gift was in the form of a man.

Astronomy was important

In April of year twenty of Utmost Justice (AD 1360), Hu Da Hai, one of Zhu Yuan Zhang's generals, took Chuzhou. Hu Da Hai was a general who valued talents. Upon hearing that nearby there were several exceptionally talented men who kept themselves low, he dispatched people to invite them. The so called low-keyed men were men like mysterious dragons, whose heads are visible but not tails, and when others have finished their lunch, they are still doing their morning toiletry. They might not have real capabilities, but it would be better anyway to drag them in.

The names of the low-keyed men were Ye Chen, Zhang Yi, and Liu Ji.

The first two came immediately upon receiving the invitation. But, Liu Ji, the last one, just wouldn't come despite repeated invitations.

Hu Da Hai thought the man was too arrogant and didn't want to send for him anymore. But someone told him that, it didn't matter if they got Ye Chen and Zhang Yi or not, but this Liu Ji must be acquired, because he knew astronomy.

In these days people have only limited interests in astronomy. But at that time, this was a

[25] The original text says south, which is not correct. The Yangtze River flows north east from Jiangxi province to Nanjing, or Yingtian.

remarkable skill. It was not something that an ordinary person could learn and it was considered one of the studies that would only interest the royals. The earthly emperors and princes felt the vast earth could not satisfy their desires and vanities. They linked their fates with those of the stars in the sky. A birth was equivalent to a star coming down to earth (which usually accompanied by wind and rain). Acceding to the throne was equated to the blinking of Purple Forbidden Enclosure[26]. Throne being taken was equated to a foreign star invading the constellation. A death was equated to a meteor falling down to the earth.

In summary, everything had something to do with stars. Men who had such knowledge were not just talents, they were genius.

Hu Da Hai reported it to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was very interested in the man. A man named Sun Yan was sent for Liu Ji. But Liu Ji wouldn't acknowledge the favor. Irritated, He presented a sword to Sun Yan, which was not a friendly gesture. Sun Yan, seeing his mission might not be accomplished, also grew angry. He tore away his mask of benign appearance and said some words that carried a profound meaning: This sword should be presented to the Son of Heaven, who uses swords to kill those who don't obey orders.

Liu Ji took the hint. He would not fall into an open trap and obediently went to work for Zhu Yuan Zhang. But for the moment Zhu Yuan Zhang wasn't aware of his true capabilities and regarded him just as an astrologer.

Gold would eventually shine.

Decision

When the news of the loss of Taiping reached Yingtian, Zhu Yuan Zhang gathered his advisors to work out a strategy. In the meeting, there were different opinions. Most (note this word) of them suggested fleeing. Some others suggested withdrawing to Mt Sapphire and setting up a defense there. The two groups of people agreed on one point, which was to abandon Yingtian.

These everyday self-promoting, magic making, and prophesying advisors now revealed their true faces. Besides excoriating Chang Yu Chun, the other thing they did was to boast how strong the Han army was, how Taiping was lost, and how their own troops were so inferior, etc.

In summary and to summarize, there must not be a fight and if there was a fight, they would lose.

Zhu Yuan Zhang looked at these men and was disappointed. He believed most of them

[26] The North Star.

had already packed up and prepared carriages for their wives and children to escape. They were ready to go to work for a new boss. Then, once he stumbled and fell, they would stomp on him. Stoning someone down already in a well and robbing during a fire were the specialties of these people.

At this time, he saw Liu Ji, who was both glum and calm and seemed to want to say something. He asked: "Liu Ji, do you have something to say? Say it."

Liu Ji's colleagues stopped their discussion and looked at him. Ever since this man came to work for Zhu Yuan Zhang as an advisor, he had been reticent and hadn't offered much advice. Every one somewhat looked down on him. Because he was nice and didn't have a temper, he was most liked by others.

Liu Ji stood up. His patience was running out after a long waiting and listening. He revealed his true face. He was not a nice gentleman anymore. He was someone who knew astronomy when looking up and geography when looking down. He was that Liu Bo Wen[27], who planned and strategized in mind and guaranteed victorious in battlefield a thousand lis[28] away!

He looked disdainfully at the so-called gifted men, who on everyday prided themselves for being abler than others, and spoke in an almost hysterical voice:

"Those who suggest surrender or fleeing should be immediately executed! How can you be so scared! The enemy is strong, but he is arrogant. If we lure him deep down and attack in an ambush, Chen You Liang is easy to defeat! Those of you who think nothing but fleeing, how can you still claim yourself being a loyal servant?"

He berated those weaker men and analyzed the situation. He told everyone, Chen You Liang was not unbeatable. People around him were astonished and stared at him blankly.

"If we lose Yingtian, where else can we go? I am a feeble man, but I'll fight! If you want to go, go, but I will not go!"

"I am not going anywhere and I'll do or die with Yingtian!"

His voice was like a thunderstorm that was blowing through every corner of the hall.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was deeply stirred with all sorts of feelings. Comparing to all these so-called advisors who thought only about themselves, this man, who just recently started working for him, was rather capable of declaring he was willing to do or die with the city. He was not fearless. He knew clearly if Chen You Liang took Yingtian, all of his achievements that

[27] Liu Bo Wen was the courtesy name of Liu Ji. Educated adult men had courtesy names as form of address by others. Ji, the given name here, was usually reserved for men to address themselves only.
[28] Li is a Chinese distance unit. A li is about 500 meters.

he had struggled painstakingly for years would be lost overnight. He also would be like Xu Shou Hui and became a stepping stone for Chen You Liang on his way to the imperial throne. He couldn't be a monk anymore and he couldn't be a peasant anymore. Death was the only thing waiting for him.

Obviously he wanted to destroy Chen You Liang in one battle and make the annoying man disappear from the world. But Chen You Liang was so strong such that he seemed to be almost unbeatable. Those giant warships looked like horrible beasts that would swallow him and his little navy.

Then how about just hide away. But where? Chuzhou? Haozhou? Being chased like a dog and then finally killed like a dog?

The words of Liu Ji encouraged him. If a feeble book man can be so resolute, what do I have to fear! I had nothing before and only after overcoming numerous hardships am I here now today. Why can't I give my hands a chance to fight!

He stood up and stared at everyone sternly. He solemnly uttered four words: Fight it out here!

After deciding on the high level strategy, he gathered the advisors to discuss how to fight the enemy. Often at this time, those presumptive military advisors would make tons of suggestions, some were good and some were bad. All depended on the ability of the decision maker to discern the good ones from the bad ones. This was a low risk and high reward job. If your suggestion was used and it worked, you became a hero. If it was not used, then you could also prove afterward that you had the foresight. If it was a bad advice, it was still ok. It might be hard to find a wife but it was easy to find a boss, just get another one.

Someone said Taiping should be taken first and then use it as a shield to fight the decisive battle against Chen You Liang.

Someone else suggested taking advantage of the opportunity that Chen You Liang wasn't fully settled and attacking him now in a showdown. Attack the enemy while he was crossing the river and a complete victory would be guaranteed.

If we look at them objectively now, both ideas seemed to be good and the men who made the suggestions seemed to be knowledgeable. But would they actually work?

Once again Zhu Yuan Zhang demonstrated his military genius, which would continuously help him later in his military career.

He showed in his analysis that it wouldn't work if he first attacked Taiping. Taiping's fortification was strong and there was no assurance it could be taken. Even if it could be taken, it would not be defensible in a short term. Chen You Liang would be able to attack and take

Taiping and continue onto Yingtian. By that time the main force would already be very tired and wouldn't not be able to defined Yingtian. Proactively launching an attack for a decisive battle was also not advisable. Leaving a strongly fortified city and not defending it, and attacking without good preparation could make the whole situation vulnerable if the battle against the enemy was not decisive or if defeated.

Finally, he revealed his idea. He pointed his finger to the Dragon Bay outside of the city of Yingtian:

"Right here."

Plan and plot

Zhu Yuan Zhang's plan took into account of the fact that his navy was inferior to Chen You Liang's navy. He decided to lure Chen You Liang to the shore and a predetermined place, where he would be to do an ambush. He made an analysis of the routes of advance of Chen You Liang's navy. He thought Chen You Liang's navy must go through the Yangtze River, then enter the Qinhuai River, and arrive directly at the wall of the city of Nanjing. On this water way from the Yangtze River to the city wall of Nanjing, the only obstacle was a wooden bridge on the Trident River. The name of the bridge was River East Bridge.

If Chen You Liang took this route, Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops would directly face the dreadful fleet of warships of the Han army. He must not allow Chen You Liang to take this route.

The burial ground for Chen You Liang's Han army selected by Zhu Yuan Zhang was Dragon Bay, which featured a large open field. When the Han army came here, they must come ashore. Then his own army could utilize the limestone hill nearby as a shield and could launch sudden attacks against the Han army at any moment. This would be the best place for an ambush.

Zhu Yuan Zhang convened his senior generals, who had fought with him from Haozhou to Yingtian. Every one of them had fought numerous battles and Zhu Yuan Zhang fully trusted them. In front of these generals, Zhu Yuan Zhang shook off his hesitation and confidently announced his plan.

First, he directed Shao Rong, who defended the north side of the city, to abandon the position, because the place that he was defending was just the most critical place, Dragon Bay.

Next, he ordered Yang Jing, Zhao De Sheng, Chang Yu Chun, and Xu Da to deploy to Dragon Bay and the city south. As soon as Han troops entered the encirclement they would launch the ambush.

Lastly, he would command the reserves and position them at the Lion Hill in the northwest as the force for the final attack.

"In this battle, I, as the commander-in-chief, will signal the red flag if the enemy force has arrived. If I signal the yellow flag, you must attack in full force. This is the moment for a decisive battle!"

But Xu Da had a question. If Chen You Liang wouldn't attack Dragon Bay and instead directly attack Yingtian from the Qinhuai River, the plan couldn't work.

Yes, that's sound reasoning. What Chen You Liang had was a navy and he would choose to go on the water. Why would he be willing to give up his advantage and fight on the ground against Zhu Yuan Zhang?

A crafty smile appeared on Zhu Yuan Zhang's face, he pointed his finger to one of the generals and said: "This all depends on you."

This man was Kang Mao Cai.

This was a strategic plot. Kang Mao Cai was originally a senior general under Chen You Liang and later came to Zhu Yuan Zhang. But he still secretly maintained contacts with Chen You Liang under the direction of Zhu Yuan Zhang. In today's words, he was a double agent. He was a pawn planted to the side of Chen You Liang by Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Kang Mao Cai earlier already sent a message to Chen You Liang, informing him that he would defect and suggested Chen You Liang to attack via the water way. He would meet Chen You Liang at the River East Bridge and would remove the bridge, which was the only obstacle that blocked the advance of the navy. Then Chen You Liang's navy would take the Qinhuai River and arrive at the wall of Nanjing. Chen You Liang was extremely pleased and indicated he would offer handsome rewards after the victory. After receiving Chen You Liang's reply, Zhu Yuan Zhang ordered Li Shan Chang to build a stone bridge overnight.

This stone bridge would deliver a most severe psychological attack on Chen You Liang.

Zhu Yuan Zhang announced his complete battle plan. He stared at his generals unflinchingly: "Since we started from Haozhou, we have gone through innumerable hardships, have defeated countless enemies, and now finally got a place of our own. Although Chen You Liang is stronger than us, if we dare to face him, victory will belong to us!"

I believe I am right

Zhu Yuan Zhang was an extraordinary man.

On the way to victory, you may pick up many keys. Some keys are antique looking and

some are shining like gold, but there is only one that will open the door.

In the course of making a decision, opinions offered by many people fill your ears. They hand the keys to you and let you choose. But the most brutal part of this game is:

You have the chance to try only once.

If you fail, you'll lose everything.

In the execution of the battle plan, only one opportunity is the most optimal. Those who can grip this opportunity are genius, e.g., Napoleon Bonaparte.

In the tumultuous and complicated environment, amid countless number of suggestions, Zhu Yuan Zhang insisted on his own idea and firmly gripped the key to the door for victory.

His success was not just a matter of luck. He deserved it.

He was waiting for the arrival of Chen You Liang.

Chen You Liang was now immersed in an ecstasy. He had already become an emperor and all of his civilian and military officials bowed to him and listened to his dictations. His fleet had arrived at the gate of the city. Yingtian would be taken in days and Zhu Yuan Zhang would disappear forever from the world. The people on this large area of the land will be under his rule and became his subjects.

I am not the descendant of a fisherman. I have never been!

Good news comes one after another. Kang Mao Cai, the man I planted in Zhu Yuan Zhang's army has become my spy. Tomorrow he will open the way for me to go to Yingtian. My fleet will be all the way forward and unstoppable and conquer this rich and fertile land. Next one is Zhang Shi Cheng. I will be the final victor!

The trap at Dragon Bay

June 23 of year twenty of Utmost Justice (AD 1360) was the seventh day after Xu Shou Hui was murdered. Chen You Liang and his fleet advanced along the Qinhuai River. When he arrived at the River East Bridge, he couldn't suppress his excitement. He went ashore and in the darkness lightly called out the code word for the contact:

Lao Kang!

No reply.

Another call:

Lao Kang!

Still no reply.

Under the bright moonlight, Chen You Liang took a close look at the River East Bridge. He was surprised to find the bridge was not a wooden one, it was a stone one!

Chen You Liang felt his blood congealed. He cried out a famous word that will be cried out by countless people before him and after him:

I've been tricked!

Per his estimation, by now it would be like "torches everywhere, battle cries everywhere, and out are the enemies". But after the initial panic, he found there was nothing happening. What was going on? The usually smart Chen You Liang now was confused like someone trying to find the head and toes of a giant statue of Buddha. Could it be that Kang Mao Cai can't come because of some circumstances?

Anyway, this is a dangerous place and we shouldn't stay here.

At the same time, he received a message, his younger brother Chen You Ren with ten thousand troops were already ashore at Dragon Bay, north of the mouth of New River. The defenders had been defeated and he was waiting for the arrival of the main force.

Then, go ashore at Dragon Bay.

Chen You Liang ordered his fleet to speed up and arrived at Dragon Bay in the afternoon on the same day. Then he organized his troops to go ashore. Everything went well. But he didn't know a pair of eyes was watching him at the nearby Lion Hill.

Those were Zhu Yuan Zhang's eyes.

His prediction was correct. Chen You Liang gave up the temptation to attack via River East Bridge. He was a man full of suspicion. He must choose a reliable method to attack.

Once assured that all the troops were now in the circle of the ambush, Zhu Yuan Zhang waved the red flag. Now, five armies that had been hidden behind the Lime Stone Hill, City South of Yingtian, and Dashengguan all appeared. But they didn't raise flags and cry out. They just watched the Han army in silence. They had not received the order to attack.

Soldiers of the Han army finally found out they had fallen into a big gunny sack. The enemy was right in front of them and they could see the reflections of their helmets. But the enemies didn't move and were watching them in strange gazes. The gazes looked like those of the butchers who stared at the pigs in the sties.

There was a terrifying silence on the battlefield.

It was a silence more terrifying than death.

This was a bone chilling scene.

They didn't wait for long in this terrifying silence. On the Lion Hill, Zhu Yuan Zhang

waved his yellow flag.

The five armies under Xu Da, Chang Yu Chun, and Feng Sheng launched repeated attacks on the Han army. Cavalries came back and forth and were unstoppable! The panicked Han army could not organize a defense and everyone ran back to their ships. But the tide was ebbing and the ships were stranded. Most of the Han troops had to escape by jumping into the Yangtze River. Chen You Liang escaped by squeezing into a small boat. He fled all the way to Jiujiang. His dream of victory was shattered.

In this battle, the Han army left with twenty thousand dead bodies in the field and seven thousand prisoners. Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops suffered almost no casualties. They also captured one hundred large vessels and several hundred small boats. With these vessels, Zhu Yuan Zhang now was well prepared for the final decisive battle.

Chen You Liang suffered a defeat and escaped back to Jiangxi. Whereas Zhang Shi Cheng, aptly described as "short sighted" by Zhu Yuan Zhang, watched the sound beating of Chen You Liang and dispatched only a few thousand troops to perform a military parade along the border with Zhu Yuan Zhang's territories in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. Then they turned back. This man would be anxious only when a knife rested on his neck, exactly as described by Chen You Liang.

An uninvited guest

One day after the victory at Dragon Bay, the temple at Mt Sapphire received a worshiper. Although at the time Yingtian was already ruled by Zhu Yuan Zhang, public safety was still not good and the monks of the temple closed the gate in the evening. At the dust of this day, this worshiper walked into the gate of the temple, said it was too late for him to continue his travel, and hoped to seek a night of stay. Upon seeing this unusual (very ugly) and vicious looking man, the junior monk didn't dare to stop him and allowed him to enter the temple.

The priest of the temple heard of this and rushed out to check. When he saw this man he was also stunned. But he was a man who had seen the world, and upon further examination, he found the man exuded a heroic air. In addition, the man carried a sword, thus he surmised this man very probably was a bandit out for a robbery. This kind of people could not be offended. If he was enraged, he could set the temple on fire, then how would he protect his wife and children? He decided to let the man stay for a night.

This man was the ruler of Yingtian, Zhu Yuan Zhang. After the victory at Dragon Bay, he felt rather proud of himself and often went to check things out covertly, which also became his habit later for dozens of years. Today he came to Mt Sapphire and saw there was a temple

there, which reminded him of his years as a monk and he wanted to visit the temple.

In this night the priest brooded and couldn't fall asleep. He was afraid the man that looked very much like a robber would come out and make trouble. But he couldn't tell this to anyone. After a long deliberation, he came up with a very good idea. He decided to invite the man to the main hall to study Zen.

The so-called Zen study was pretty much like the empty confabulations of the Wei and Jing times[29]. After getting themselves fed, a group of people sat down, bragged, and swanked to each other. Swanking was not taxed anyway.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was woken up in the middle of the night and when he learned he was invited to study Zen, he felt funny and annoying. He was an exceptionally smart man and understood the intention of the priest. He was staying in the priest's place and he'd better be courteous. He followed the priest to the main hall.

Now, in the empty big hall, there were only two of them. After sitting down by east and west, the priest started to intently look at Zhu Yuan Zhang up and down. He found the man dressed plainly and looked vicious, but hinted a provincial manner. Immediately he disdained this man.

Being a bandit to this day and yet he even can't afford to wear decent clothes. It will be a glorification of him if he is said to be a bandit. He is at most likely to be a country bumpkin.

But if it was about Zen study, then something must be said. The priest opened his mouth: "Where are you from, my patron?"

Zhu Yuan Zhang replied: "Sorry to bother the priest to ask, Yours Humbled is originally from the Right of Huai."

"What's your trade?"

"Currently I don't have a trade, I'm just traversing around."

Upon hearing these words, the priest felt his assessment was correct. He was about to teach something to this country bumpkin.

"Based on my observation of your appearance, my patron, omen is in the air. Currently the world is in chaos. Patron should choose a good job, settle down, keep good care of yourself, and study some Buddhism at spare times. Then you will understand the meaning of life."

Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't show any emotion and asked: "What is the meaning of life".

"The meaning of life consists of two words, mind and state. I offer two pieces of incantation to my patron and hope that you will meditate on it."

[29] Around AD 220-280.

"Dare to listen to your teaching."

"Our ancestors said: Devoid of the state the mind doesn't exist. State cannot be harmed if the mind doesn't exist. Life is no more than a mirage. Once you have entered that state you will be able to enjoy your tranquility in peace."

Zhu Yuan Zhang looked at the haughty monk in front of him, remained silent for a long time, and then burst out a loud laugh!

The sound of the laugh echoed in the empty big hall and didn't go away for a long time.

The priest was terrified and turned pale. Zhu Yuan Zhang stood up and slowly walked to the priest. Suddenly he drew out the sword and put it on the priest's neck!

The priest couldn't conceal his feeling anymore. He panicked and lost control. He said in a trembled voice: "What do you want? If you want money, I'll give you."

Zhu Yuan Zhang said in a stern voice: "The mind of a Zen master ought to be unshakable, why are you so afraid! Right now, the world is in chaos because people cannot live anymore. Amid wars and riots, you watch the fire from across the river! If the world is peaceful, who want to roam around? People like you are well fed every day. You can marry and have children. But you only talk vainly about mind and state, just to keep yourself alive. Shame on you!"

Finished, Zhu Yuan Zhang sheathed the sword and went back to the monk chamber.

The priest finally realized this plain clothed man was rather incomprehensible.

He shouted to the back of Zhu Yuan Zhang: "This poor monk's eyes don't see the Mt. Tai. I dare to ask the graceful name of my patron."

The silhouette of Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't stop and went further.

The priest returned to his room and didn't sleep for the rest of the night. His intuition told him this man was an extraordinary man. He decided to get to the bottom of it the next day.

The next day he rose and went to the monk chamber where Zhu Yuan Zhang stayed. But the room was empty. On the wall of the main hall, there were a few lines written in vermillion:

In the south millions of men I have slain,
The sword on my belt still has the blood stain!
The old monk cannot recognize the hero of fame,
And can only timidly cry for his name.

Chapter Ten

Waiting for the Best Opportunity

For Chen You Liang, defeat was not something he could bear. After all, he had been successful. But this time he lost completely. He thought the reason for the last defeat was because he didn't fully utilize his navy. Therefore he paid more attention to training his navy. It should be said Chen You Liang made contributions to the ship building industry for our country. The sailing technology and craftsmanship for ship building used by the later great Zheng He fleet were inherited or, of course, snatched from Chen You Liang.

This time, he built a secret weapon. This was a very terrifying warship. It was as tall as several fathoms. There were three decks and horse riding was possible on all decks. The lower deck was designed for rowing. The decks were separated, which was a very scientific design. Even when there was fierce fighting on the upper deck, the propelling power could still be maintained. What was more terrifying was every ship was clad in iron sheets. This ought to be truly an air craft carrier of the time.

The other design reflected the personality of Chen You Liang. Between the decks of the warships there was excellent sound proofing. Although there was only one layer of planks separating the decks, conversions on the upper deck couldn't be heard on the lower deck. It seemed that Chen You Liang could have been one of the creators of sound proofing technologies. The advantage of this design was even if there was a defeat on the upper deck, the people at the lower deck would continue to fight. It could also prevent secrets from being leaked. No matter what, you are going to follow me, Chen You Liang, all the way to the end.

You can't help but admiring this kind of smart and crafty people.

In the meantime, Zhu Yuan Zhang at downstream was not at all more relaxed. He knew the last defeat to the wealthy and powerful Chen You Liang was just a drop in a bucket of water. During a disaster, a rich family with plenty of provisions could easily withstand and survive it. But he was still truly a poor peasant and had only handful of spoils captured from Chen You Liang. If there was any problem, who would be the one receiving the blows of the autumn wind?

What irritated and bothered him more was Chen You Liang was at upstream while he was at downstream. It's quite easy for us to understand the psychology. This is like you live downhill and he lives uphill and every time you need to look up to look at him, which makes you very uncomfortable.

If Chen You Liang washed his face in the river, Zhu Yuan Zhang would have to drink his face washing water.

If Chen You Liang washed his feet in the river, Zhu Yuan Zhang would have to drink his feet washing water.

If Chen You Liang peed into the river, Zhu Yuan Zhang…

This ineradicable man was like the sword of Damocles, which was always hung over Zhu Yuan Zhang's head and would not allow him a single night's good sleep.

I must destroy him.

Chen You Liang had new weapons and he was very happy. Starting from year twenty of Utmost Justice (AD 1361), he continuously engaged in naval battles with Zhu Yuan Zhang. He had more victories than losses, which made him even more superstitious about the power of weapons.

It should be pointed out that the bigger reason for Chen You Liang's defeat was he never understood what the most powerful weapon was. It was neither the number of troops and advancement of weapons, nor the powerful fleet. It was the people's support.

Change

Zhao Pu Sheng was an excellent general. In every attack, he always carried a pair of blades leading the charge toward the enemy. He was never a man that yelled "go ahead brothers". He was highly respected and he was friendly to Chen You Liang. Because he was a country pumpkin, he very much admired the literate Chen You Liang. He always called Chen You Liang a scholar and treated him like a brother. But, for the purpose of seizing control of the Empire of Tianwan, Chen You Liang killed him. Zhao Pu Shen, even at his death, would never have thought the scholarly Chen You Liang, who always greeted him with a smiling face, would kill him.

Chen You Liang achieved his goal but he never knew what he lost far outweighed what he gained. He seemed to sense something from the whisperings and remarks of the soldiers and the odd looks of his subordinates. But he didn't care. He controlled the most powerful machine of war, and he was the most powerful man.

Changes were in people's hearts. This man is a man of betrayal and unworthy of trust. People's appraisal of Chen You Liang was just about that. The soldiers of the Empire of Tianwan were no longer fighting to create an ideal empire. They fought only for the pay so that they could live.

There is no fighting power in an army that has no beliefs and fights only for food. It is also an unstable army.

Chen You Liang was about to taste his bitter fruit.

When Chen You Liang's navy was winning victory after victory, his subordinates reported to him a piece of bad news. The general who guarded Hongdu defected to Zhu Yuan Zhang. Chen You Liang was dumbfounded by the news.

Hongdu was today's Nanchang of Jiangxi province. In Wang Bo's[30] *Prelude for Prince Teng's Pavilion*, there were the words "Hongdu, the new city". This place was very important to Chen You Liang because the capital of his Empire Wu was in Jiangzhou (present day's Jiujiang of Jiangxi province). Friends who have been Jiangxi should know how close these two places are. This was equivalent to having a nail in front of his eyes and he couldn't allow this to happen.

But unexpectedly, this time Chen You Liang didn't rush to launch an attack. Based on his usual command style, he was a man who would do what came into his mind and someone who did first and then thought later.

But this time the situation was different. He learned his lesson. He would get himself well prepared before going to a fight. He was a patient man. From year twenty one to twenty two of Utmost Justice he fought with Zhu Yuan Zhang in small skirmishes. He was not in the mood to spar with the peasant Zhu Yuan Zhang. He was waiting for the most optimal moment, before which, he'd be patient. Zhu Yuan Zhang, eventually you will expose your weakness.

And indeed he got his chance.

In February of year twenty three of Utmost Justice (AD 1363), Zhang Shi Cheng launched a sudden attack to Zhu Yuan Zhang's northern neighbor Han Lin Er and Liu Fu Tong. He attacked Anfeng (now Shouxian of Anhui province), a key stronghold of the Red Scarf Army. More critically, both Han Lin Er and Liu Fu Tong were in the city. If the city was breached, both of them would be finished.

Zhang Shi Cheng attacked Han Lin Er for a very simple reason. He already surrendered to the Yuan Dynasty in year seventeen of Utmost Justice (AD 1357). Now he belonged to the regular Yuan government force. Comparing to Chen You Liang, who committed all the possible sinful acts and dared to be proud about them, he was a spineless man. More ironically,

[30] Wang Bo was a famous poet of Tang dynasty.

soon after he reinstated the title Wu of his empire. What a genuine private salt dealer.

Liu Fu Tong was desperate. Xu Shou Hui belonged to the Red Scarf Army, but he didn't exist anymore. Who else could he rely on? He had fought for his entire life and was this the end of him?

Zhu Yuan Zhang would be the only one he could rely on. Although he didn't award him the position of chief commanding marshal, he still thought Zhu would come to rescue him based on his belief they were all the Red Scarf Army.

He sent a letter to Zhu Yuan Zhang asking for help. Zhu Yuan Zhang received it and summoned Liu Ji to discuss about it. Liu Ji didn't say anything and asked Zhu Yuan Zhang's opinion first. Zhu Yuan Zhang thought they must go for the rescue. There were two reasons, first they were part of the Red Scarf Army and Han Lin Er was still nominally his emperor. Second and the most important reason was Anfeng was the gate of Nanjing. If Anfeng was lost, Nanjing would be threatened like teeth losing the protection of the lips.

The reasoning seemed to be flawless and the one making the decision was Zhu Yuan Zhang himself, but Liu Ji opposed it.

What could be his arguments for him being against it?

A fatal mistake

Liu Ji opposed Zhu Yuan Zhang head on and refuted point by point the two arguments made by Zhu Yuan Zhang.

First, Han Lin Er was already a useless man. It would be ok if they went and failed to rescue Han Lin Er. But if they were successful and got Han Li Er, what would they do with him?

Next, losing Anfeng was just a small problem. How would they react if Chen You Liang took the opportunity and launched an attack?

It was indeed a tough choice. After some hard thinking, Zhu Yuan Zhang still opted for his own decision to send troops to Anfeng.

Rarely did Liu Ji adhere to his own argument and this time he did. He grabbed Zhu Yuan Zhang's sleeves and wouldn't let him go. He was determined to ask Zhu Yuan Zhang to give up on the plan to attack Anfeng.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was a stubborn man. For a long time his intuition had proved to be correct and this time he still believed his intuition.

Based on how Liu Ji dealt with this matter, we can see this man was indeed a genius. He

not only was knowledgeable about astronomy and geography, he was also more skillful than Chen You Liang on the *Art of Black and Thick*. He saw that the best way to avoid having himself known as someone who killed his monarch was to let the monarch die himself.

The reputation of Liu Bo Wen was indeed not obtained out of nothing.

Yet at the time (note this phrase) on these matters, Zhu Yuan Zhang was apparently not up to Liu Ji's ability. Zhu Yuan Zhang finally went with his army.

A big mistake was thus made.

Just like three years ago when he stood at the top of Lion Hill watching Chen You Liang, Chen You Liang was now watching him from Jiangzhou.

A great feeling of ecstasy rushed to his heart.

The opportunity finally came!

Zhu Yuan Zhang went to Anfeng and Chen You Liang knew everything about it. But inexplicably, he didn't do anything!

Why he didn't value this opportunity is a mystery hard to solve.

Later military analysts often interpret it by his slow reaction and misjudgment. But the reality was probably not so.

As a loyal ally of Chen You Liang's, Zhang Shi Cheng actually meant to threaten Yingtian as he attacked Anfeng now. In the ensuing progression of the war, he was about to design an even bigger trap for Zhu Yuan Zhang.

On March 1 of year twenty three of Utmost Justice (AD 1363), Zhu Yuan Zhang set out to rescue Anfeng with these possible outcomes:

One, Anfeng was successfully saved and Han Lin Er and Liu Fu Tong were rescued. He would achieve a great fame and Han Lin Er from now on would be his puppet.

Two, Anfeng was lost and both Han Lin Er and Liu Fu Tong were dead. He would not be under anyone.

On March thirteen, Zhu Yuan Zhang arrived in Anfeng and got his eventual battle result.

Anfeng was lost and Liu Fu Tong died in the battle. But Han Lin Er was rescued out by him from the melees.

This was a result that made Zhu Yuan Zhang could neither laugh nor cry. He not only failed in securing the gate, but also received a burden.

Yet there was something he didn't know, an even bigger net was about to be opened on him.

Chen You Liang was watching Zhu Yuan Zhang's performance with a lot of interest and prepared for his next move.

Yes, Anfeng is not far enough, far from far enough. This is not an ideal place. I must find a place and let Zhu Yuan Zhang use up all of his strength, and then fight a decisive battle against him.

Hongdu betrayed me but I didn't attack Hongdu, it's not because I didn't want to, it's because the timing has not been right. Before that, I have to wait. When you are ensnarled by the net, it's time for me to attack.

Zhu Yuan Zhang, I have changed my mind. I'm not going to just push you away, I'm also going to kill you!

Those who dare to oppose and not obey me are destined to be destroyed!

Disappointment accompanied Zhu Yuan Zhang on his way back to Yingtian. Seeing Han Lin Er next to him, he didn't know what to do.

At the same time, Zhang Shi Cheng's troops didn't stop. On Zhu Yuan Zhang's retreat route, they organized small forces to relentlessly harass Zhu Yuan Zhang's army of tens of thousands. What an annoying private salt dealer! This kind of half fight half flying guerilla tactic greatly irritated Zhu Yuan Zhang. Then he made the worst mistake in his military career:

Attack Luzhou!

Zhu Yuan Zhang finally stepped into the trap.

March on!

Luzhou was today's Hefei of Anhui province. The city was very well fortified and heavily guarded by Zhang Shi Cheng's army. Zhu Yuan Zhang's plan was obvious, if he took Luzhou, he would open the way to Zhan Shi Cheng's home base in Zhejiang and Jiangsu area. This would compensate for his trip that had so far yielded no result.

But Xu Da was adamantly against his plan.

In Zhu Yuan Zhang's tent, Xu Da repeatedly explained his idea. Rescuing Anfeng was already a mistake. If they now launched an attack on Luzhou, which was well fortified and hard to take, then if Chen You Liang sent troops out, there would be unpredictable disasters.

Zhu Yuan Zhang did not think so. He sent troops to Anfeng and Chen You Liang didn't move, which proved this man's intelligence was limited, what was to fear?

Xu Da still stuck to his own opinion.

Zhu Yuan Zhang suddenly interrupted Xu Da and cried out a thunderous shout. His eyes were blazing angry fires. This mission was not only void of results but he also got himself an

obscure boss. Having been disgraced like this, how could he go back to face Liu Ji? Thus he made up his mind:

"You don't need to say no more. I have made up my mind, I must take Luzhou!"

"Go!"

In the meantime, Chen You Liang, whom Zhu Yuan Zhang thought as having limited intelligence, was now in his mobile palace and looked up and down at his palace for the last time. Standing behind him, were all the senior generals of the Han army.

He never rested for a moment. In the dozens of days and nights, he mobilized all the strength of the most powerful war machine. He organized an army of six hundred thousand, who would ride the invincible warships and launch the final attack on Zhu Yuan Zhang!

I will endure no more. Zhu Yuan Zhang, your day has come!

He raised a wine bowl and made a final speech to his generals:

In this campaign, we take all of our forces out and we're not going to leave anything here for ourselves, which is like we have broken the cauldrons and sunk our boats! In this battle we're only going forward and survive, there is no way back or there is death! We'll fully destroy Rebel Zhu. It will be done all in this battle and the world will belong to our great Han!

He drank the wine and smashed the bowl on the ground.

"Go!"

Two armies marched out from different points and marched out to different targets. But both would arrive at that fateful battlefield for the final showdown!

Chapter Eleven

The Miracle in Hongdu

In April of year twenty three of Utmost Justice (AD 1363), Chen You Liang and his army started his final campaign.

Not long before that, a man came to Hongdu. He was assigned to defend this place by Zhu Yuan Zhang.

His name was Zhu Wen Zheng.

This man was a nephew of Zhu Yuan Zhang's. Because the location of Hongdu was critical and couldn't be lost, many people didn't expect Zhu Yuan Zhang would give the important job of defending Hongdu to someone who didn't even have facial hair over his lips.

He was no more than just a dandy, which was how people thought of Zhu Wen Zheng before he received his assignment.

Based on facts, this assessment was not wrong.

Right after arriving at Hongdu, Comrade Zhu Wen Zheng loitered around brothels and fun houses and ate and drank all days and all nights. He even composed music and asked girls to rehearse and perform. He assigned the important work of planning the defense to his subordinates and did nothing by himself.

All of his behaviors showed the typical bad traits of a playboy, a wastrel, and a vagabond.

Every time when Zhu Wen Zheng got drunk and lost consciousness, his subordinates could only shake their heads and sigh. He was a big daddy, on whom nothing could be counted. Hongdu was in danger…

The first target of Chen You Liang's attack was just Hongdu.

Later people couldn't understand this decision by Chen You Liang. Why not just attack Yingtian directly, which would let Zhu Yuan Zhang face his enemies on two fronts and he could be easily defeated. Why didn't Chen You Liang pick the easy one?

This seems to be a problem that is hard to explain. But I believe Chen You Liang and this

problem can be easily explained.

The flaws of Chen You Liang's personality decided he must attack Hongdu.

He was an evil spirited and ruthless man. He lived his life in betrayal and deceit. These things were not stranger to him. The defection of Hongdu should not be something that was totally out of expectation.

But from a psychological point of view, a man like him despised being betrayed by someone else the most. For him personally, the most loathsome thing was often what he was most capable of.

I must take back what belongs to me!

By taking Hongdu, I can teach those who betrayed me a lesson and let them know that they must be absolutely loyal to me!

Allow me to betray all and allow none to betray me. This is a disease common in this type of people.

Of course, there were other advantages in taking Hongdu. It could be used as an offensive base for an attack against Yingtian or a defensive base. If the attack to Yingtian was not successful, it could be used to control downstream and seek opportunity to fight another day.

All kinds of stories about the dandy Zhu Wen Zheng also naturally went into the ears of Chen You Liang, which was another big encouragement to him.

Taking Hongdu seemed to be as easy as flipping a hand!

But he seemed to have missed something.

For someone as smart and careful as Zhu Yuan Zhang, it was impossible for him to not know the behaviors of Zhu Wen Zheng. How could he have assigned such an important position to someone like that?

On the day when Chen You Liang launched his attack on Hongdu, Zhu Wen Zheng, who, upon receiving the news, stashed away his drinking and entertainment paraphernalia and showed his vicious face to Chen You Liang.

The fifth best general in the world

According to traditional ideas, the quality of a man is often appraised by if he is indulged in women and drinking. If this was the standard, then Comrade Zhu Wen Zheng was definitely a bad man.

But people often ignored the fact in this world there are useful bad people and useless good people.

Zhu Wen Zheng was a real bad man, which led to his tragedy later. But unquestionably, he was a useful man.

Under Zhu Yuan Zhang, there were many talented generals, whose military capabilities and accomplishments were no inferior to any other famous generals in history. Among these stars of generals, Zhu Wen Zheng was a bright one.

By military talent and accomplishments, Zhu Wen Zheng could be placed at the fifth. This is not because he was not good but the four in front of him were all those that couldn't be exceeded. Later we will tell the stories about them.

There was another man defending Hongdu with Zhu Wen Zheng. Deng Yu was also an important man. If we need to rank him, he should be at the sixth place because he was one of the empire's six founding dukes.

Facing a strong enemy, Zhu Wen Zheng showed his capabilities. Hongdu was a city with strong fortification. But it had a weakness, there were too many gates. I tallied and there were eight gates. They were the Fuzhou, Palace Walk, Dirt Walk, Bridge Walk, Zhangjiang, New City, Glazed Ceramic, and Dantai gates. In addition, there was a water gate.

Having more gates symbolized the prosperity of a big city. But when the city faced an army of six hundred thousand, this kind of prosperity became a nightmare. With numerical superiority, the attacking troops would be able to attack all the gates at the same time. But the defenders had to be busy all the time trying to defend every gate.

But Zhu Wen Zheng was indeed a once in a life time military genius. The troops that could be used for defending the city were really scarce. But he was able to allocate them in an orderly fashion.

He should feel lucky. The generals defending the city were all very experienced. He made some adjustments based on the strengths of these generals:

Fuzhou gate, the most important gate, was defended by Deng Yu.

Zhao De Sheng was charged to defend the three gates Palace Walk, Dirt Walk, and Bridge Walk (this was a tiresome and the heftiest task).

Xue Xian (a ferocious man) would defend the Zhangjiang and New City gates.

Niu Hai Long and Zhao Guo Wang would defend the Glazed Ceramic and Dantai gates.

Zhu Wen Zhang was probably an accountant, after he made all the arrangements, he still had two thousand people left (how did he squeeze that out), which he could use to support the gates when needed.

Everything was all set. They only had to wait for Chen You Liang.

The battle of Hongdu would become Chen You Liang's nightmare.

The final mobilization

Chen You Liang led his army toward Hongdu. There has been controversies ever since on the actual number of his troops. Based on the size of his fleet I came up with an estimate. His largest ships could carry two to three thousand men. The small ones could carry more than a thousand. And for this campaign he launched more than two hundred ships. Thus the total number of men was from four hundred to six hundred thousand. It was indeed a large army. The so-called saying "block the river by dropping whips" would not be an exaggeration.

On April 23 of year twenty three of Utmost Justice (AD 1363), Chen You Liang's army arrived at Hongdu. Zhu Wen Zheng and his generals saw the most terrifying scene. Hundreds of thousands of people surrounded the city like water tight. The surface of the river was packed with giant warships. Reflections from the armors and weapons of the soldiers were brighter than the sun light. The waving banners and flags were next to each other and continuously stretched for dozens of lis, which shrouded Hongdu like a big cloak.

The descending dark cloud on the city seemed poised to crush it.

Zhu Wen Zheng held the last conference of all of his staff at his headquarters. His usual cynicism was completely gone and he stood solemnly, which surprised very much those who secretly remarked he didn't act like a general. His solemn and chilly expressions and severe tune stifled their breath. They all lowered their heads and listened to him.

"I know you don't like me and said things about me on my back. That doesn't matter. I don't like you either. But now Chen You Liang's army of six hundred thousand is outside of the city. If someone wants to surrender, you can go out now and I'm not going to stop you. But if you don't go, then your only recourse is to stay with me and fight to death or until the city falls!"

He looked at the generals in front of him and a cold and sad feeling rushed into his heart. In this battle, how many can survive? Can they still be seen later, how about myself?

He used what could be the most amicable tune to end his speech:

"Take care everyone and hope we'll see each other later, when we'll be rich and noble."

Upon hearing these words, the generals raised their heads. They were astonished to see there were tears in Zhu Wen Zheng's eyes.

Nothing needed to be said more. For those who lived on the edges of swords, they understood the situation facing them. They didn't like Zhu Wen Zheng. They didn't like his

debauchery and indiscipline. But they understood now they were truly the comrades in arms.

They walked to the gates assigned them to defend. For many of them, those were the places where their lives would end.

The so-called comrades in arms are partners who live and die together.

On April 24, Chen You Liang started the attack. The Battle of Hongdu began.

The contest of wills

The first target selected by Chen You Liang's army for attack was just the Fuzhou gate defended by Deng Yu. There was a wide open area in front of the gate and it was very suitable for offense. Chen You Liang decided they would enter the city from here!

At dawn, the Han army attacked the Fuzhou Gate. The fight was fierce. The soldiers inside the city continuously threw big stones and wood logs they had prepared down to the soldiers below the wall. Chen You Liang's soldiers used bamboo shields, which apparently couldn't be used to resist those big objects falling from the sky. The casualty was heavy.

The situation lasted for three days. Dead bodies of the Han army heaped up like hills but they didn't even advance a single step.

Now Chen You Liang realized the issue was not as simple as he thought.

He issued strict orders to soldiers. If they couldn't take the Fuzhou gate, they'd be court martialed!

On the 27th, the fiercest assault on the Fuzhou Gate began.

Forced and threatened by execution, Chen You Liang's troops launched assault to the Fuzhou Gate. Because the missiles, stones, and logs from above were too heavy, troops used the weapons at hand to hack the city wall like crazy. They managed to punch a hole on the city wall as wide as a dozen zhangs[31] (a tofu construction[32]). Most of the time in this kind of situation, the commander of the gate would order a retreat and organize street fighting. But the famous general Deng Yu, in his own way, showed us how a city wall was built.

Deng Yu's secret weapon

When Deng Yu learned the city wall had been broken, he didn't panic. He already

[31] Zhang is a Chinese unit of length. A zhang is about 3 meters.

[32] From late 1980s to early 2000s, China's economy advanced at a rapid pace. Buildings and other infrastructure projects were launched everywhere in the country. Many contractors chose to violate building codes and used inferior materials, which resulted in many quality problems in constructions. There were frequent reports of collapsed buildings and bridges. People call these types of constructions 'tofu constructions', comparing the concrete used in the construction to tofu.

predicted this and was well prepared with another weapon.

When Chen You Liang's troops went over the gap and got ready to go inside the city, they found the soldiers inside were aiming at them with strange things.

Sounds of gun fire broke out.

Guns? Yes, Deng Yu's weapon was the blunderbuss. By the end of Yuan dynasty, blunderbuss was already very advanced after the improvements made in Song and Yuan and it could already be deployed in large scale. But because it was too complex to operate, many people (e.g. Chen You Liang) weren't willing to deploy it, although they occasionally used it. The one that truly used blunderbuss to arm an independent unit was Zhu Yuan Zhang. Later, the Smart Weapons Brigade, one of the big three brigades of the Ming army was a blunderbuss brigade.

The blunderbusses caused a great psychological shock to the soldiers of Chen You Liang. For a time they dared not to advance. Deng Yu deserved his reputation as a famous general and he knew the Han army would come back very soon. He didn't just follow the routine to repair the city wall. Instead he used trees to build a temporary wall or a fence.

Paying attention to details in this kind of ad-lib reactions are the best measurements of a general's ability.

As expected, soon the Han army came back and fought for the fence against Deng Yu's troops. The defenders replied with missiles and blunderbusses. But there were too many enemies and gradually the defense slackened. Just at this moment, Niu Hai Long and Zhao Guo Wang's idling defenders from the Glazed Ceramic Gate and Dantai Gate came to help. Zhu Wen Zheng now correctly analyzed the battlefield situation and led the main force to reinforce the defense. The defenders were aroused and fought desperately against the Han army. Zhu Wen Zheng thought if the city wall was not repaired, eventually it would not be able to withstand the enemy's assault. Thus he ordered to repair the wall while the fight was still going on.

Frankly speaking, I still can't imagine what kind of a scene it looked like. The soldiers in the front fighting with knives while men behind were laying bricks with trowels.

Chen You Liang also saw the city wall of Fuzhou Gate was the best opportunity for a breakthrough. He personally commanded the assault and demanded for absolute victory.

Chen You Liang and Zhu Wen Zheng looked at each other not from far away. When he saw the fierceness of the defending troops, he realized he might have made a mistake in underestimating the capability of Zhu Wen Zheng.

The brutal fight lasted from dawn to dusk. Both sides didn't seem to want to go back to rest.

To encourage the troops, generals on both sides went into the battle personally. Li Ji Xian, the governor of Hongdu, Niu Hai Long and Zhao Guo Wang, who rushed over to help, all died in battle, which lasted to until next morning. Zhu Wen Zheng's construction team repaired the wall. The Han army, seeing it was hopeless to take the city, finally withdrew.

This battle was the hardest one since the fight started. Both sides fought desperately and the final victory belonged to Zhu Wen Zheng. But his losses were also heavy and he also was wounded.

I'm going to kill that contractor who built the wall at the Fuzhou Gate. I believe this would be the thing Zhu Wen Zheng wanted to do the most.

The brutality of the battle also made Chen You Liang cringe. In the next few days he didn't launch large scale assaults. Rather he divided his forces and occupied Ji'an as a backup. Inside the city, after the troops experienced the test of the brutal fights, they gradually grew accustomed to the war. Later events proved it was a big miscalculation on the part of Chen You Liang to slacken his offense. Soon he would face an even more stubborn defense.

After a week of small scale assaults, Chen You Liang again launched a large scale assault.

On May 7th, after personally examining the city defense, Chen You Liang decided to attack the New City Gate.

This was not a good pick, because the defender of New City Gate was Xue Xian.

Xue Xian, in today's jargon, could be thought as a daredevil. He was well known for being rude and wild and was a bully in Hongdu. No one dared to confront him. Chen You Liang would soon suffer.

On May 8th, Chen You Liang ordered his army to attack the New City Gate. A new round of assault began.

But when Chen You Liang's troops, with armor on and bamboo shields in hands, carefully approached the gate, they unexpectedly found out the stones and missiles were not that intense. They were very glad and Chen You Liang decided to use Duke Lu's Vehicle!

Duke Lu's Vehicle was a large vehicle designed for attacking city walls. But since it was too complicated to disassemble and was not mobile enough, it was not often used in intense combat. If it is not used now, then when?

In the city, this was the moment that Xue Xian had been waiting for.

Now, he opened the city gate and the Han troops at once got very excited, the very gate that they desperately tried to and couldn't enter now was open.

What came out were Xue Xian and his cavalry.

The troops who were setting up the assault vehicles didn't expect the men from the city dared to charge out. There were confusions. Xue Xian led the cavalry charge, which made quite a show of force, and then withdrew into the city.

Hence after, the Han army never dared to mount a strong attack to the New City Gate.

As the saying goes, I am a hooligan and I'm afraid of nobody.

The fight went on from May to June and Chen You Liang could only sigh at the city, is Hongdu unconquerable?

He decided to attack via water.

On June 14th, he suddenly attacked the water gate of Hongdu. But what waited him were the lancers who had been staying there for a long time. As soon as the Han troops got close to the water gate, the defenders used the specially made lances to attack them from behind the iron grates. Numerous were stabbed to death or wounded. Han troops took the risk to grab the long spears and for a moment stabilized the situation. Then the stabbing of the long spears from inside stopped. The Han troops were ecstatic and thought the defenders had run away. But after a while, the long spear stabbing from the inside resumed. The Han troops were accustomed to it and still grabbed the spears using their hands. Terrible cries broke out as soon as the spears were grabbed. Taking a closer look, they found the defenders had heated the spears and iron hooks in the fire before resuming the stabbings against Han troops.

Oh, they went back so to heat them up.

Chen You Liang was greatly humiliated and in a limbo. He tried all sorts of ways to attack the city. Hongdu was right in front of him but he just couldn't get in.

Out of ideas, he went to attack the Dirt Walk Gate defended by Zhao De Sheng. It was not entirely no gain in this battle, Zhao De Sheng, the general who was in charge of defending the gate, was shot to death by a sniper's arrow. But someone immediately took up the command and firmly maintained the control of the gate.

Chen You Liang sank into desperation.

What kind of a place is this! When can I get in!

Actually, in the city Zhu Wen Zheng was experiencing the same kind of misery.

When can we get out!

It's a siege, a real siege.

The iron soldier Zhu Wen Zheng

Zhu Wen Zheng hadn't had a good sleep in over a month. He made the plan and

deployment before Chen You Liang's army came. He went back and forth to the eight gates and commanded and encouraged the generals to get ready. When in combat, he slept with his armor on. If there was any situation, he had to immediately get up and lead his meager troops to offer reinforcement. He was a real fireman.

Alas, being a leader was really not easy.

But he indeed made through it. Relying on his tenacious will he was able to resist the attack of an army of six hundred thousand, stopped them under the city wall and made them immovable.

Tenacity can overcome a strong enemy, Zhu Wen Zheng proved this point.

Readers may have found a problem, why hadn't the reinforcements come?

This was such a big battle that Zhu Yuan Zhang must have received the news, why was he still not helping Zhu Wen Zheng?

On this matter Zhu Yuan Zhang couldn't be blamed.

This is because Zhu Wen Zheng never asked him for help!

Most of the times in such kind of defensive battle where the enemy was strong and his own side was weak, the general would at the first moment ask for help from the commander-in-chief. He would write something like if you don't come soon enough we're all going to be finished. He would give the letter to the courier and repeatedly affirm: Ask him, to come right away, otherwise I and the men, will be all dead!

Zhu Wen Zheng was an extraordinary man!

He seemed to have taken Chen You Liang as a tourist camping at Hongdu.

The Battle of Hongdu went on for over a month. Zhu Wen Zheng, relying on city walls of tofu quality construction and limited number of troops, fought repeatedly against Chen You Liang's indomitable fleet. Relying on his military talent he made through it. He seemed to think he still had the strength to contest Chen You Liang and consume more of the enemy's strength to prepare for a decisive battle.

He also underestimated Chen You Liang. How could a commander who commanded six hundred thousand troops be hindered by a small city of Hongdu?

Taking Hongdu was just a matter of time.

In June, Chen You Liang launched an even bigger attack. Zhu Wen Zheng's keen military sense told him the resistance of Hongdu was approaching its limit. He couldn't drag on any longer. He sent a man to see Zhu Yuan Zhang.

This was a man worth mentioning, his name was Zhang Zi Ming.

Zhang Zi Ming departed from Hongdu to find Zhu Yuan Zhang. For safety, during the day, he didn't travel but slept instead, and travelled in the night when there were fewer people (more like adjusting for jet lag). Thanks to this inefficient way of traveling, it took him half of a month to come to Yingtian and find Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Zhu Yuan Zhang at this moment was also in a dump. He sent Xu Da to attack Luzhou and received basically the same kind of treatment as what Chen You Liang received. He still couldn't take the city.

Zhu Yuan Zhang asked about Zhu Wen Zheng's situation. Zhang Zi Ming was a clever man. He didn't say words like Zhu Wen Zheng couldn't hold anymore, instead, he said: Chen You Liang brought many men with him but his casualties are heavy. Also, he has been out for a long time and provisions are falling short. If you send troops out you will be able to defeat him (what was he doing earlier).

After hearing these words, Zhu Yuan Zhang was very happy. He immediately sent someone to Luzhou to order Xu Da to return and readied himself for the decisive battle.

Then he told Zhang Zi Ming: You can go back now. I'll do some preparation and go to Hongdu soon.

How soon is soon?

Zhu Yuan Zhang continued: Ask Zhu Wen Zheng to hold for one more month, I'll be there in a month!

A month? By that time perhaps the bones of Zhu Wen Zheng would have been used to beat drums.

Zhang Zi Ming' courage

Even though, Zhang Zi Ming still went back. This time, to save time, he travelled day and night. But unexpectedly when he arrived at the Mouth of the Lake, he was captured by Chen You Liang's troops. Chen You Liang personally received him.

Chen You Liang's first impression of Zhang Zi Ming was this man was an idiot. He stood there and didn't even know where to put his hands.

This man is easy to deal with.

Chen You Liang started to work on changing Zhang Zi Ming's mind, starting with chats on families to unifying the country and nationalism, etc. and Zhang Zi Ming just kept nodding his head. Chen You Liang finally got bored of talking and expressed his true intention:

Cooperate with me, induce the surrender of Hongdu and you'll remain alive. If you don't,

you'll die.

Zhang Zi Ming kept saying: I'll cooperate, I'll cooperate.

Thus Chen You Liang sent men to escort Zhang Zi Ming to the foot of the city wall and ordered him to shout inside and ask the men inside to surrender.

Zhang Zi Ming agreed at once. He walked to the city and shouted:

Please, everyone stay put, our troops will be here very soon!

Chen You Liang was dumfounded. He couldn't imagine the feeble book man could be so courageous. He was enraged. He took a knife and killed Zhang Zi Ming.

Now he understood this book man was not afraid of death. He couldn't die because his mission had not been accomplished yet.

He still could remember the eyes of Zhang Zi Ming before his death, ridiculing him.

What disturbed him more was from the eyes of his generals, he saw their admirations for the book man.

How can these guys who kill without blinking their eyes admire such a man?

No, things shouldn't be this way. The man who possessed the most strength can decide everything, isn't it so?

When I was weak, those who were stronger than me bullied me at will and without impunity. Now I have the most powerful army and I'm strong. Everyone in the world should be afraid of me and scared of me and respect me!

But why that miniscule book man wasn't afraid of death and me?

For the first time Chen You Liang started to doubt his own way of doing things.

In this world there are many issues that cannot be resolved with violence and power. Chen You Liang didn't understand this, just like Xu Shou Hui didn't understand Chen You Liang's way of survival.

Start of the gamble

In June of year twenty three of Utmost Justice, having decided on a strategy of a decisive battle against Chen You Liang, Zhu Yuan Zhang recalled Xu Da's troops from Luzhou and mustered all of his best forces, which included two hundred thousand troops and the best generals under him, Xu Da, Chang Yu Chun, Feng Sheng, and Guo Xing. Even civilian advisors like Liu Ji also joined the campaign. Just like Chen You Liang, Zhu Yuan Zhang also came with nothing left behind.

Sooner or later there will be such a fight that can't be avoided, if so, this is the fight.

Chen You Liang and Zhu Yuan Zhang were like two gamblers. One brought six hundred thousand and the other brought two hundred thousand to carry out a dangerous gamble. Their chips were the lives of numerous people. They were gambling with their lives, wealth, and everything else.

But the most attractive thing about this gamble was the winner would acquire the right to rule this large area of land. The reward was too tempting and no one would be able to refuse it.

On July 6 of year twenty three of Utmost Justice (AD 1363), mindful of all the potential risks and rewards, Zhu Yuan Zhang set out from Yingtian to take part in this gamble.

Of course Zhu Yuan Zhang wasn't really demanding Zhu Wen Zheng to hold for a month. His troops did forced marches toward Hongdu day and night and never stopped. They were marching toward the fateful battlefield.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was on the march. It was a clear day and there were breezes on the river and it was mild and comfortable.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang was not in the mood to enjoy the scenery. His flag ship was advancing toward Hongdu. He turned back his head and saw many of his warships and the civilian and military leaders who commanded the ships. This was an army of two hundred thousand. Every time Zhu Yuan Zhang thought about this, he couldn't control his excitement.

From a boy cattle herder who had nothing to the commander-in-chief of this force of thousands of troops and horses, how have I come to this point? I have gone through numerous trials and tribulations, destitution and desperation, now I'm going to contest for the world!

Chen You Liang is so powerful with indomitable warships and ferocious soldiers. He has always been stronger than me, ever since.

This is no longer like three years ago. There is nothing like that cheap ambush anymore. This time I'm going to face his real strength. I'll fight him head on!

Zhu Yuan Zhang's hands started trembling, which indicated fear, as well as expectation.

When faced with a powerful enemy, people first react like a new born calf daring against a tiger. They will go in for a fight and then worry about everything else later. The mistake in this kind of behavior is a new born calf is really not afraid of the tiger, it's because he doesn't know the terror the tiger possessed.

When Zhu Yuan Zhang was weak and small, he concentrated on expanding his territories by occupying Chuzhou and Hezhou. Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng were nothing to

him!

Then as his own strength grew he realized that in front of him was such kind of a behemoth, which was the sort that was terrifying and unbeatable. He finally started to fear.

The closer the level someone gets to that of his opponent, the better understanding of the strength of his opponent, the more fearful he becomes. When his fear reaches the max, it's the time he can match up against his opponent!

Zhu Yuan Zhang kept chasing Chen You Liang and understanding the terror from Chen You Liang. He also kept increasing his own strength, all for the final decisive battle. If he is beaten, there is nothing to fear in the world!

Chase in a tremulous body and challenge with a fearful and respectful heart.

Chen You Liang, now I have the ability to fight you for a showdown. You have spent two months in Hongdu. How much moral and provisions do you still have left? I have fewer troops but I am not afraid of you!

If I beat Chen You Liang, I will be the ruler of the world!

Suddenly a strong gale blew over the river and Zhu Yuan Zhang's ship swayed. He was also awoken from his deep thoughts. This was not the field for the decisive battle and Chen You Liang was not that easy to defeat. To beat him, there was still a long way to go.

Horses cross the river and the aromas of alfalfas are sweet,
Under the clouds and rains we cross Xiao and Xiang rivers to meet,
From his dreams, the eastern wind blows a hero awoken,
It is not Xianyang, but rather Luoyang to be taken.

Victory is still remote. Let me think about how to fight.

Chen You Liang, I'm here!

On July 16, Zhu Yuan Zhang's army arrived at the Mouth of the Lake. To ensure the battle would be a decisive one , he divided his forces, which occupied Trans-River Mouth and South Lake Mouth. He also blockaded the Wuyang Crossing, which was the only possible retreat route for Chen You Liang. Chen You Liang's retreat was blocked.

After some careful considerations, Zhu Yuan Zhang correctly realized that to completely defeat Chen You Liang, the only possible was to destroy Chen's navy. He made up his mind to settle the outcome in the water.

On July 19, after learning Zhu Yuan Zhang had come to help and blocked his retreat route, Chen You Liang proactively withdrew from Hongdu and went to Lake Poyang to seek a decisive battle against Zhu Yuan Zhang there.

He was tired of dealing with this man and didn't want to wait any more. He didn't want to

escape from the blockade and return to Jiangzhou, although that was very easy for him. Those shabby ships of Zhu Yuan Zhang's that were blocking the river mouths were nothing in his eyes.

I have run out of my patience. If you want to do a naval fight, then come on and let's fight it out in the water!

On July 20, navies of Zhu Yuan Zhang and Chen You Liang came to Lake Poyang separately and met at Mt Kanglang. After so many twists and turns, the two forces finally arrived at the place of a decisive battle.

The big battle will be in tomorrow!

Lake Poyang, also known as Pengze, was bounded by Mouth of the Lake in the north, stretching to Sanyang in the south. On the west was the Gate City and it reached to Poyang in the east. From north to south it ran for three hundred lis. At the time, for both Zhu Yuan Zhang and Chen You Liang, it would be thought as vast and boundless. Upstream it received waters from five rivers, Gan, Fu, Xin, Rao, and Xiu. Downstream it pours into the Yangtze River. Because it is wide in the south and narrow in the north, it's shaped like a gourd.

Doubtlessly, in terms of terrain this was an ideal battlefield.

In AD 675, the lesser known genius Wang Bo went to Jiaozhi[33] to see his father. On his way he came to Prince Teng's Pavilion and was impressed by the beautiful sceneries and colors of the mountains and lakes and in one stroke wrote down *Prelude for Prince Teng's Pavilion*, which would last for thousands of years.

When Wang Bo climbed up to Prince Teng's Pavilion and saw the blue waves and Lake Poyang, which blended the water and sky in the distance, he was filled with emotions and excitements. He wrote down the verses that would be sung by people for thousands of years:

Falling rainbows and lone ducks fly together,
Autumn waters and deep skies unite in one color.

Now this place, in which prodigious brilliant lights were shinning, would become an even brighter stage. On this stage, the most spectacular show of this war would be presented.

The eve of the battle

Zhu Yuan Zhang's fleet docked at Mt Kang of southern Lake Poyang, across from Chen You Liang's fleet. The lights from the enemy's ships could clearly be seen.

There would be a decisive battle tomorrow, which was what Zhu Yuan Zhang afraid of

[33] Present day Vietnam.

and also what he looked forward to. If he lost the war he would have nothing left and if he won he would get everything.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's thoughts went back to twenty years ago, when he received the letter from Tang He.

If at that time I didn't go join the rebellion, what would be my life like? I may be living peacefully and spend the rest of my life somewhere.

The fact is that the course I have chosen has been the toughest. From Guo Zi Xing to Han Lin Er and from Chuzhou to Yingtian, what a course it has been. I have survived cabals and betrayals and blood and killings. Is this my fate?

I cannot turn my head back anymore. I can't be a monk anymore. I can't be a peasant anymore. I can't even be a beggar anymore. I'm either going to be the ultimate supreme ruler, or I'm going to die in battle!

I have endured tribulations that ordinary people cannot endure. I have suffered the miseries that ordinary people cannot bear. This is what I deserve! This is exactly the day I've been waiting for!

I must win!

Victory must be mine!

Chen You Liang, come and gamble with our lives!

Across the lake, Chen You Liang was also in deep thoughts, but he was thinking about another problem.

Ever since I joined the rebellion, two words, loyalty and trust, have not existed in my thinking. To get to where I am now, I have killed many.

Ni Wen Jun recognized me and promoted me. I owed him his recognition and I killed him.

Zhao Pu Sheng was an honest man. He respected me and treated me like a brother and I killed him.

Xu Shou Hui yielded his power to me. He wanted only to live and I killed him.

This is how the world works, isn't it? Only being evil and vicious can victory be assured, for when you are weak, no one will pity you!

I believe there is no wrong in all I have done.

For the power and status I have today, I value not so-called reputations. Let those moralists scold me. Power in hands and strength in force are the most important. I betrayed many people and they don't trust me anymore. They may betray me but if I own the most powerful

force, I can control everything!

Finally I am here at this point now.

I must not lose. If I lose, everything is finished!

I don't want to be ridiculed and looked down by others again. I want the respect that belongs to me!

Zhu Yuan Zhang, come on, I'm here waiting for you!

This was truly a decisive battle, which would decide not only the fate of Zhu Yuan Zhang and Chen You Liang, but also the fate of the people of the world.

In this decisive battle, there was no difference between right and evil. The victor would take everything and the loser would lose everything.

There were no rules in this battle. There were no referees. All these things seemed so powerless in front of win and loss. For the two sides in battle, victory was Amitabh, victory was the supreme lord, victory was the *Four Books and Five Classics*, and victory was Justice and Virtue.

Fight it out!

The winner would be a king!

The loser would be a tramp!

Chapter Twelve

Lake Poyang! A Desperate Showdown!

On July 21, the Battle of Lake Poyang officially began.

Not until the two sides started deploying on the lake did Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops find a serious problem.

There warships were too small, like toys, comparing to Chen You Liang's gigantic ships. Among Chen You Liang's warships, the longest ones measured fifteen zhangs in length, two zhangs in width, and three zhangs in height. Readers themselves can calculate the size of the ship. The ships had three stores and there were even soldiers riding horses patrolling on the decks. From the bow one couldn't see the poop. Soldiers who stood on their own warships had to raise their heads to look at the enemy ship.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang's main warships were still Chen You Liang's ships captured in the battle of Dragon Bay in year twenty of Utmost Justice. There were also some fishing boats among them. Although Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops already heard about the ferocity of Chen You Liang's warships, only upon a close look, could they discover this was such a terrifying fleet.

How to fight such a battle?

This scene should have left a deep impression in Zhu Yuan Zhang's mind. Later ship buildings in Ming Dynasty were all targeted to build giant ships. When Zheng He sailed west, the largest "Precious Ship" was as long as 127 meters, which seemed to be more of a demonstration against Chen You Liang of years ago.

But under the situation, it was not possible to withdraw, there could only be fight.

Attack first! The thrash by Xu Da!

Amid permeating sighs, Zhu Yuan Zhang revealed his methods for defeating the enemy. He said, although the enemy ships were big, they were immobile. Taking advantage of the agility of their own ships, the enemy could be defeated.

It could be said like this, but who would go in to fight?

Then, Xu Da stood up.

"Let me be the vanguard!"

Xu Da was not just a man foolishly brave. He carefully analyzed the weakness of the enemy ships and ordered his ships to form small groups carrying blunderbusses, arrows, and crossbows. Once they were near the enemy ships, they would first fire the blunderbusses and shoot missiles. As soon as they were close to the enemy ships, they would climb up the ships and fight with the enemy in close combat.

After careful considerations, Xu Da, Chang Yu Chun and Liao Yong Zhong made a detailed battle plan and readied themselves to deliver a heavy blow to Chen You Liang.

The next day, Xu Da and his fleet started the assault.

He was in front of his men and spearheaded the advance. After getting close to Chen You Liang's forces, he took his troops and launched an unexpected sudden attack to Chen You Liang's vanguard.

Chen You Liang's troops panicked. They didn't expect Zhu Yuan Zhang to attack first. In a hurry, they sent out their fleet to meet the attack. Then, Xu Da's fleet suddenly divided into eleven groups and attacked the giant ships from different directions (this was similar to wolf pack tactics). Because the giant ships were not easy to maneuver, they couldn't take care of each other and repel Xu Da's attack. Whereas Xu Da, taking the opportunity, climbed up to one of the giant ships and killed more than one thousand enemies and captured the ship. Chen You Liang's vanguard was defeated.

Chen You Liang's troops found out the tactics of Xu Da's attack and concentrated dozens of large ships for a group attack. Xu Da hurried up and withdrew his fleet. Chen You Liang's force followed and attacked. But they didn't know this was a trap.

Chen You Liang's force followed to chase Xu Da. But all of a sudden the direction of the wind turned against them. Yu Hai Tong, who had been waiting for a long time in the center fleet immediately concentrated large number of guns and bombarded Chen You Liang's force that came into range with great intensity. Chen You Liang's forward fleet almost entirely got destroyed. More than twenty warships were burned and destroyed.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's force scored the first win.

But eventually Chen You Liang was still Chen You Liang. After the initial set back, he immediately reorganized his fleet, taking advantage of his large ships and using the guns on the ships, he launched intense attacks on Xu Da's force.

In this attack, Xu Da's ship got hit and he had to abandon his flag ship to move to another ship. Temporarily he lost his ability to command his fleet. Taking the opportunity, Chen You Liang's force counter attacked and sank dozens of Zhu Yuan Zhang's ships in succession. Zhu Yuan Zhang's force suffered heavy losses, countless number of men drowned.

The two sides now returned to a state of stalemate.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang's nightmare was just beginning. Chen You Liang's force was about to start an unexpected attack.

This attack was also not expected by Chen You Liang. But for Zhu Yuan Zhang, it was almost fatal.

Zhang Ding Bian's charge

The end of Yuan was an era in which there emerged many famous generals. Under every warlord there were a large number of bold and courageous generals. Among them Zhu Yuan Zhang's generals were the best. These men all had their specialties. For example, Xu Da was good at strategy and tactics, Li Wen Zhong was good at long range raids, Chang Yu Chun was good at assaults, Feng Sheng was good at flank attacks, and Zhu Wen Zheng was good at defense. But on boldness, no one out ranked Zhang Ding Bian!

Zhang Ding Bian, born in AD 1318, was a native of Mianyang of Hubei province. Just like Chen You Liang, he was also born into a fisherman's family. This man was not only valiant and skilled at fighting he also knew astronomy and geography. He even could do divination. He was a childhood buddy of Chen You Liang's and also his die hard loyalist. Early when in Hubei, Chen You Liang and Zhang Ding Bian became sworn brothers. They swore to live and die together. Chen You Liang was suspicious of everyone but greatly trusted him.

Once the battle was in a stalemate, Zhang Ding Bian decided to take his action. This was not known to Chen You Liang ahead of time. It was believable that if he knew, he would absolutely not agree to the action.

Zhang Ding Bian led his flagship and two auxiliary vessels out of Chen You Liang's naval formation. Both sides thought he was out on a patrol and didn't pay much attention. But something unexpected happened.

Zhang Ding Bian and his three ships didn't pause for a moment and rushed directly to Zhu Yuan Zhang's flagship!

He was to take the head of the commander-in-chief in the midst of a million men!

Zhang Ding Bian was indomitable. He led a lone force and charged into the forward

formation of Zhu Yuan Zhang's navy. Now both sides of the battle were shocked by him. Chen You Liang's troops also didn't know why this situation occurred. While Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops were not prepared, the men in the front withdrew in haste. Zhang Ding Bian didn't care and he went directly to Zhu Yuan Zhang.

He charged into the center and now Zhu Yuan Zhang's navy realized his target was Zhu Yuan Zhang, the commander-in-chief of the whole army!

The shocked generals one by one came back to their senses and immediately commanded their ships to block. Zhang Ding Bian charged into the center and was already surrounded by more than thirty warships. He had no way forward and had pursuers behind. To these generals the performance of Zhang Ding Bian already ended.

But what would awe them was still ahead of them.

It could be said that every part of Zhang Ding Bian's body was full of valor. He was enveloped and alone. But he fought even better as the fight went on. He was unstoppable!

Although he was alone and deep inside the enemy line, he was really ferocious without comparison. To encourage the soldiers he stood at the bow with sword in his hand and showed them he was not about to withdraw. The soldiers were moved by his valor and all fought with their best efforts. The ships thus fought out of the heavy envelopment and defeated Zhu Yuan Zhang's generals along the way. They successively killed senior generals Han Cheng, Chen Zhao Xian, and Song Gui, among others. He fought and opened a bloody trail and Zhu Yuan Zhang's navy was cut into two halves. He came directly at Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Now in the back, Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops, seeing Zhang Ding Bian's ships charging toward them, panicked. They ordered the ships to evade. But just like a leaky roof in a rainy night, the turn was too hasty and the ship got stranded!

Zhu Yuan Zhang was out of his means. There were no ships to rescue him, he was about to become a prisoner.

In martial arts novels, usually in this kind of situation, there must be a beauty in dire strait and some martial art master comes out for the rescue. Reality tells us that in real history, under a crisis, there would also be a martial art master coming out. The Zhu Yuan Zhang now was an example.

Although it was not a hero rescuing a beauty (whose appearance seemed to be far from considered a beauty), it was still legendary and full of color.

Chang Yu Chun, the archery champion

Chang Yu Chun's ship was not far from Zhu Yuan Zhang's. When everyone was extremely anxious, he held a bow in his hand and came to the soldier who was on the lookout. He said to him calmly, "Don't panic, tell me, who is Zhang Ding Bian?"

The soldier pointed his finger to a man standing at the bow. Chang Yu Chun pulled his bow string, placed the arrow and even before the soldier put down his hand, the arrow already left the string. The single arrow hit Zhang Ding Bian (who was also a moving target). Being hit, Zhang Ding Bian couldn't command anymore and had to withdraw from Zhu Yuan Zhang's navy, and there wasn't any one stopping him.

Zhang Ding Bian this time acted like a real Zhao Zi Long[34], but unfortunately Zhu Yuan Zhang was not Cao Cao[35] and there was no rule against using arrows.

The second day of battle ended on that note. It was truly a day that shocked people's senses.

In that evening, Chen You Liang held a military conference and summarized the results of the battle during the day. He thought he should take advantages of what his warships had to ensure that assaults could be done in groups. But the speeds of the ships were different and there was no way to ensure they would be in sync. Thus he came up with an ingenious idea (conjured up by himself). Tie up the ships with iron chains! (sounds familiar?)[36]

This should really not have been so. It was said Chen You Liang and Shi Nai An maintained a good relationships[37]. On this note, he also should have known Luo Guan Zhong[38]. Then he should have not made this mistake. For an unknown reason, Chen You Liang adopted Cao Cao's stupid idea. It seemed after Luo Guan Zhong wrote *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* he didn't send Chen You Liang a copy.

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[34] Zhao Zi Long was a general in the Three Kingdoms era. The story referenced here seemed to reference some stories told in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. There are several stories that seem to fit but none directly correlate to the scenario described here.

[35] Cao Cao was the prime minister of the late Han Dynasty in the Three Kingdoms era. Here Zhu Yuan Zhang was compared to Cao Cao in escaping a certain capture. But there are no stories in the novel that directly correlate to the scenario described here.

[36] Here the author is referencing another story in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The story describes the Battle of Red Cliff, in which a double agent working against Cao Cao offered a piece of advice to Cao Cao. The idea was to tie up Cao Cao's fleet with iron chains to stabilize the ships. Cao Cao's soldiers were mostly northerners who were not used to walking on swaying ships. The chains indeed stabilized the ships. Cao Cao thought it was a good idea. But when the battle began, the wind blew into the ships. The enemy navy launched fiery missiles to the ships. When one ship caught fire, it quickly spread to the other ships, which were tied up. The fire quickly consumed the whole fleet and Cao Cao was defeated. There is a dramatic and detailed description about the battle and there is some historical evidence to support most of the stories.

[37] Shi Nai An was a novelist around the same time and wrote the novel *Tales of the Marsh*.

[38] Luo Guan Zhong was Shi Nai An's student and the author of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which contains the story about the battle of Red Cliffs.

The third day

Zhu Yuan Zhang attacked first. He personally sounded the horn and mustered the forces to formation for a decisive battle. Now the chained fleet of Chen You Liang demonstrated its awesome power. Connected together, the fleet extended for ten lis and looked like a mountain.

Zhu Yuan Zhang sent three fleets in turn to attack and all were beaten back. With an acute sense Chen You Liang recognized the weakness on Zhu Yuan Zhang's right flank. He thus ordered his force to launch heavy attacks on Zhu Yuan Zhang's right flank. This was indeed very serious, Zhu Yuan Zhang's force could not hold. Seeing the situation was not good, Zhu Yuan Zhang stood at the bow with sword in hand and declared the flagship as the bottom line, anyone retreating beyond it would be immediately executed.

But even after he executed more than a dozen retreating knights of a thousand, he still couldn't stop the retreat. The whole army seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Then, when no one expected, in his army there also emerged a bold general like Zhang Ding Bian.

Ding Pu Lang was a sworn brother of Zhao Pu Sheng's and was also one of Xu Shou Hui's Four Heavenly Kings. He didn't go to Zhu Yuan Zhang at his own volition and was forced under the circumstance. Thus he didn't usually fight vigorously. But now his opponent allowed him to reveal his true color as a mad man.

For him, everything else was secondary and only brotherhood was the most important. Chen You Liang was a wickedly wretched man, who killed Zhao Pu Sheng. Today he must pay with his life!

It was said he raised a white banner at his ship's bow, on which eight words were written: "Stay Away All Others, Kill Only Ninety Four", for it was said the nickname of Chen You Liang was Chen Ninety Four. This was saying, I am only looking for Chen You Liang to settle the score, all others stay away.

Based on their names, Chen Ninety Four and Zhu Double Eight, both were men of miserable beginnings.

Ding Pu Lang's charge

After a good show by Zhang Ding Bian, Ding Pu Lang put up a sequel. He also took his warships to charge into the enemy formation. This was the moment when Zhu Yuan Zhang was beaten back and retreating, thus his attack brought back troops' moral and allowed Zhu Yuan Zhang to hang on to the moment of the final showdown.

But his charge was not effective, unlike Zhang Ding Bian, he charged into where there were the most men. He was brave but ineffective. He took many hits (wounded more than a dozen

times). This is the difference between the braveries of a celebrated general and a foolish general.

How to take the head of the commander-in-chief from an army of a million men?

Let's analyze this strange phenomenon in wars, how to take the head of the commander-in-chief from an army of a million men. After some careful research, you'll learn this is rather a very technical job.

Everyone should have played Three Kingdoms themed electronic games, in which if you want to fight to near to senior generals like Xiahou Dun and Cao Cao, etc. you must first beat off many other minor soldiers, like the Bear or the Fatty[39], etc. My skill is not good, every time before I reach the senior general, I'm already dead in the hands of nobody.

The scenario is similar in actual wars. To kill the commander-in-chief amid thousands of men is not that easy!

Let's use the senior general Guan Yu[40] in *Three Kingdoms* as an example. The way he killed Yan Liang[41] (this is a historical fact)[42] is worthy of investigation. First, Yan Liang was standing in front of the formation and didn't know Guan Yu was about to come to kill him. Next, Guan Yu had fast transportation (a fast horse), "A big shout and charged down", before Yan Liang knew what was going on, he lost his head[43].

Thus this kind of killing featured several characteristics, in plain language it means to find an opening, before you are ready, and stab you. This is pretty much like stabbing someone in the back.

Overall, to achieve this goal, it's going to take a long way.

First of all, it must be done suddenly. You can't shout to the opposing troops: I'm about to kill your commander-in-chief, get ready. You can't do it this way. You should pick only the ones that are not ready.

Next, you need to have a good aim. You can't just charge into the crowd. Learn from the badminton players and drop the ball into the gaps, or the joints, of the crowds. Take for example of today's Golden Week's tourists attractions, don't charge into the crowd. If you do

[39] These are characters in the games.
[40] Guan Yu was one of Liu Bei's sworn brothers and is one of the heroes in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. In the novel, he is described as a godlike general who was extraordinarily brave. Here the author is using a story told in the one of the beginning chapters of the novel. In the description, Guan Yu charged out alone into the enemy formation and chopped off the head of a senior enemy general and went back untouched. He did it so quickly that no one was able to react.
[41] Yan Liang is a senior general killed by Guan Yu in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.
[42] History documents recorded only that Guan Yu killed Yan Liang. But there is no record how Yan Liang was killed. The story told in the novel is probably a pure fiction.
[43] This is a rehearsal of the same story in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Most Chinese readers are familiar with this story.

so, you may be squeezed to death before beaten to death.

Lastly, you must be fast, possessing advanced transportation (a fast horse or ship). In addition, use some sort of sound effect (such as a big shout) to confuse the opponent. Make the opponent feel like trying to touch a tall statue of two zhangs so that he could touch neither the feet nor the head. Then a cut and his head will be gone.

Mission accomplished. Thus we can see this sort of military operation is very technical.

Zhang Ding Bian was a man with these capabilities. He understood well about the military tactics and was able to grasp the time and opportunity. Thus he delivered a heavy blow to Zhu Yuan Zhang.

But Ding Pu Lang was just a foolish man. He charged left and right, not only was he not able to approach Chen You Liang, he got himself surrounded. He lost his life and it was both tragic and moving. According to *The Official History of Ming*, he was severely wounded and was still standing when his head was gone. The man was standing still with weapon in his hands. The troops of Chen You Liang thought they saw a god coming down to the earth. But according to my reading of other historical records, it was that he got surrounded and didn't want to be captured and he killed himself. By common sense killing himself shouldn't be an act so gruesomely heroic that he was able to cut off his own head. This could only be left as unresolved.

Regardless, Ding Pu Lang was a man of brotherhood. He didn't die together with his brother but he sought for glory and got his glory. He died with his will fulfilled.

Ding Pu Lang's attacked provided the courage for Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops to continue the fight and allowed them to wait for the arrival of the moment that decided the outcome.

Gale! Gale!

In the continuous retreat, Zhu Yuan Zhang realized if he allowed it to be so the whole army would be destroyed. Then, his division commander Guo Xing made a suggestion to him: Now the situation is serious, it's not because the troops are not fighting hard, it's really because we don't have a good solution. The enemy's ships are too big. We can't defeat them unless we use fire!

Zhu Yuan Zhang concurred. He immediately ordered seven ships to load up with gun powders and put up armors on straw men, posing for battle. He organized death squads to operate the ships and ordered men to coordinate with them.

Everything was ready, but it could not be carried out.

Because Zhu Yuan Zhang ran into the same problem Zhou Yu had[44].

There was no wind!

Regardless how powerful Zhu Yuan Zhang might be, he could do nothing against Heaven. He looked at Guo Xing, meaning to ask for some ideas. Guo Xing was also out of ideas, he replied to Zhu Yuan Zhang: Let's just wait.

The wind wouldn't come just because it was asked. Zhu Yuan Zhang could only organize his troops to resist desperately.

The bitter struggle went on like this. Then at three in the afternoon, miracle happened.

The northeast wind started to blow!

Zhu Yuan Zhang gave the order: Send out the fire boats!

The seven boats set themselves on fire and then got close to Chen You Liang's warships. The fire was aided by the wind and the wind helped the fire! Because Chen You Liang's warships were all chained up, then couldn't extricate themselves and were suddenly engulfed in a sea of fire.

Zhu Yuan Zhang took the opportunity to order the troops for an all-out attack. All of a sudden the shouts of battle cries shook the world.

Just at that moment Chen You Liang was resting in the headquarters and was dreaming of completely destroying Zhu Yuan Zhang. Suddenly a soldier ran in and shouted: Big trouble!

Chen You Liang knew it was not good. Before the soldier finished his words he walked out of the cabin to inspect.

The first thing he saw was the eyes of the soldiers on the warship.

In terrible red!

The blazing fire colored every soldier's eyes red.

There was no way to reverse the course!

Right now, it was near dusk. The setting sun was as red as blood and the blood streamed on the ground. The blood of the killed soldiers reddened the lake water. The vast Lake Poyang became a lake of blood.

On sunny days the golden colored lights bend,
Birds flying and boats sailing,
On rainy days the cloud and water blend,

[44] Zhou Yu was the commanding general of the Kingdom of Wu in the Battle of Red Cliffs. The story says that he prepared to use fire to attack Cao Cao's ships and only after everything was ready did he realize that the direction of the wind was wrong. The novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* dramatized the situation. It is not historically known if the wind was of such a critical element as described in the novel.

Wind howling and waves soaring.

This was the usual beautiful scenery of Lake Poyang. But now Laky Poyang was filled with battle cries. Fires shot through the sky and blood flowed everywhere.

Chen You Liang's dozens of warships were all burned and destroyed. Fires on the boats shot to the sky and there were terrible cries of the soldiers who were burned to death or killed. Chen You Liang understood he was finished.

Fire and blood painted the sky into the terrifying red color. This is the real autumn water and the deep sky united in color!

In this terrible red color, hundreds of thousands of men, knives and swords in their hands, fought to death. They didn't know each other and there couldn't be much animosity among them. But right now, they were enemies under the sky. Death gripped everyone. The miserable shouts and cries of the soldiers made everyone tremble.

This was really hell in the human world!

The starting blazing fires glowed in the cloud and sea,
The tall ships of Red Cliff were suddenly no see.

Chen You Liang was now truly ruined. He collected his troops. There was only half of the original fleet left. But he could definitely not go back to Jiangzhou anymore.

Once the gambling game got started, regardless of win or loss you couldn't just walk away. The game would continue until one of them lost everything and then it would end.

Chen You Liang's last strike! The white flag ship

Chen You Liang convened his generals and looked at them in his reddened eyes. He could lose no more. But unexpectedly he didn't blame his generals. He understood in this situation, they were all in the same boat.

We are beaten today, but victory still belongs to us!

The generals looked at him, is there any way to achieve victory?

Yes, we still have a way!

In the meantime, on Zhu Yuan Zhang's flagship, the generals were ecstatic, some of them were even preparing for victory celebration. Zhu Yuan Zhang was no exception. He told his generals Chen You Liang was already defeated and his end was just days away. We will certainly destroy him!

Xu Da rather remained calm. He reminded Zhu Yuan Zhang that Chen You Liang still had a lot of remaining strength. If he was pushed to a corner, he would fight in desperation. We

still need to be careful and we absolutely cannot let our guards down.

Zhu Yuan Zhang turned his excited face, looked at Xu Da, and showed a cunning smile.

"I know."

Day four.

Chen You Liang's confidence stemmed from his intelligence. Under the current situation, it was impossible for him to completely destroy Zhu Yuan Zhang's fleet. He could only use the last method, kill Zhu Yuan Zhang!

He already knew from intelligence the flag ship of Zhu Yuan Zhang had been painted white. If he concentrated all of his forces on the white flag ship and kill Zhu Yuan Zhang, he would win!

But once he arrived at the battlefield, he was dumbfounded. In overnight, many of Zhu Yuan Zhang's ships were painted white. He could no longer recognize the flagship.

Before he could regain his senses, Zhu Yuan Zhang already ordered his troops for an all-out attack. Encouraged by the results of two previous days, Zhu Yuan Zhang's troops were extraordinarily ferocious. They used the ship dividing tactics and took advantage of the immobility of Chen You Liang's large ships, and sunk many of Chen You Liang's warships. The battle raged on from dawn to dusk. Chen You Liang's forces couldn't hold and retreated.

The Battle of Lake Poyang thus ended its first stage. Chen You Liang suffered a horrible defeat and was forced to Zhuxi on the west bank of Lake Poyang.

The defeat of Chen You Liang

Chen You Liang was now hopeless, not only militarily but also in life. Since forever his behavior had told him if he was vicious and evil he would be able to get everything. But the fact was in front him. The seemingly fragile Hongdu could resist for three months and the seemingly feeble Zhang Zi Ming wasn't afraid of death.

Am I wrong?

No, impossible, this is only an aberration, I cannot be wrong!

But events later forced him to admit his own mistake.

His Left and Right Generals of the Palace Guards took their troops and surrendered to Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Upon hearing this news, rage overtook all of his senses. He ordered if any of Zhu Yuan Zhang's soldiers or generals were captured, they'd be executed on the spot!

But Zhu Yuan Zhang, upon hearing the order, issued a contrary order. If Chen You Liang's troops were captured, they would be well treated and then released.

Issuance of the two orders completely corrupted the moral of Chen You Liang's troops. The soldiers were extremely resentful to Chen You Liang. They ran away in droves.

Chen You Liang waited for a long time on the west bank and fought against Zhu Yuan Zhang for more than thirty days and opportunities didn't come. On the opposite, his troops were continuously reduced and his generals were no longer loyal to him.

On August 26, he finally made a decision, escape!

He looked at this large and vast lake for the last time. The dream and ambition to unite the country would come to an end like this. He came with a gigantic fleet and six hundred thousand troops, now he had only some remnants of them left. For a man with an ambition like Chen You Liang's, all these would count for nothing. Troops could be recruited and ships could be rebuilt. What puzzled him was why he lost?

I'm not lacking in intelligence and skills at commanding my subordinates. I am not as soft as a woman. I dare to kill all those who oppose me on my way. And I am not afraid of people saying things about me. All these are not what ordinary people can do. I am more vicious and evil than anyone else. Why am I losing? I already own the most powerful army and machines of war, why are my subordinates betraying me?

Chen You Liang would never be able to find the answers because the answers were already in his own behavior. Ever since he killed his own brothers and leaders, his generals already understood his moral standard, which was whoever was more powerful and more vicious would control everything!

There were no rectitude, morality, and trust. When these behaviors were taken as the tenets of life by his generals, his army became a collection of hundreds of thousands of vicious Chen You Liang. This kind of collection is the Gang of Stars in Jin Yong's[45] novels. As soon as Chen You Liang was down, no one would continue to remain loyal to him. Rather they would step up and tramp on him and push him to the bottom of the well and cover it with stones.

Of course, the defeated Chen You Liang was not completely worthless to them. At least his head was still worth a lot of money.

Chen You Liang was insidious and sinister, but his generals were even more insidious and sinister than him. Chen You Liang had a blind faith in governing by violence and his generals believed in violence even more.

[45] Jin Yong was a modern Chinese novelist who wrote many martial arts stories.

When violence, his basis for survival, was overthrown, he lost all of his cards and there was only ruin waiting for him.

The seasoned Zhang Xue Liang[46] once used his own life experience to tell Japanese youths: Don't believe in violence. The history has proven violence wouldn't solve any problem.

I believe this is the real reason for Chen You Liang's defeat.

Chen You Liang hoped for a retreat. He selected Mouth of the Lake as the point of breakthrough. But the Chen You Liang now was no longer the Chen You Liang then. Only after he fought desperately and suffered heavy losses did he manage to open Mouth of the Lake.

Now he could take a breath, but Zhu Yuan Zhang wouldn't let him go.

Zhu Yuan Zhang had been beaten up by Chen You Liang for years and deeply resented him. With an army of a hundred thousand, he was going to chase him to the end.

Chen You Liang heard the news and came out to the bow of the ship to command the battle. Just at this time, a stray arrow came and punched through his skull.

There everything ended!

No, things shouldn't be like this. What did I do wrong?

After Chen You Liang died, Zhang Ding Bian fulfilled his duty. He grabbed Chen You Liang's son, Chen Li, and took Chen You Liang's body back to Wuchang.

Thus the thirty-six day Battle of Lake Poyang ended with the complete victory of Zhu Yuan Zhang and complete defeat of Chen You Liang.

This battle laid the foundation for Zhu Yuan Zhang to conquer the world. The Battle of Lake Poyang also was in history books as one of the greatest battles in China's history.

On Zhu Yuan Zhang's victory, the ordinary people lived in the surrounding areas naturally had their own explanations. Because the place of the decisive battle was in Mt Kang, people thought the real reason for Chen You Liang's defeat was the ill-chosen location. When a pig (Zhu) sees bran (Kang)[47], he is happy". Thus Chen You Liang failed. If Chen You Liang knew this in the underworld, he would probably be so enraged that he would want to come back alive.

Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't give up on Chen You Liang's descendant Chen Li, although he wouldn't be able to pose any threat to Zhu Yuan Zhang. Mowing the grass was important,

[46] Zhang Xue Liang was a Chinese war lord in the 1930s and 40s, who started a military coup against the Chinese Nationalist government under Shiang Kai Shiak. He was later arrested and put under house arrest for life.
[47] The Chinese word 'Zhu' is the same in pronunciation as the word 'pig'. The word 'kang', which is usually a surname, has the same pronunciation as the word 'bran'.

uprooting along the way was also necessary.

In February of year twenty four of Utmost Justice (AD 1364), Zhu Yuan Zhang personally went to Chen You Liang's last territory, Wuchang area, where Chen Li was, to monitor the battle. The commander-in-chief, Zhang Ding Bian, deserved being considered an old hand at taking advantage of opportunities. He saw the situation was bad and took Chen Li out and surrendered.

Zhu Yuan Zhang finally conquered Chen You Liang, the enemy that gave him the biggest headache in the land of China.

The world will be taken!

Worthy of mentioning was Zhang Ding Bian, who remained loyal to Chen You Liang to the end and fulfilled his original oaths when they swore as brothers. He refused the positions offered by Zhu Yuan Zhang and went to do Zhu Yuan Zhang's previous job as a monk.

Ironically, he seemed to want to pick on Zhu Yuan Zhang. He lived all the way to year fifteen of Perpetual Happiness (AD 1417), when he died at age one hundred. After Zhu Yuan Zhang was dead, he continued to live on for another twenty years, which could be thought as a vindication on behalf of Chen You Liang. Everyone thus can learn from this. When you deeply hate and want to chop someone using a knife, use Zhang Ding Bian's experience to encourage yourself. Don't get mad, keep well of your own wellbeing, and just try to live longer than him.

Let's go back to take a look at Chen You Liang's life and give him a fair appraisal:

Undoubtedly, Chen You Liang was a bad man in the traditional sense. But in that chaotic world, his behavior was rather a common choice at the time. If someone wanted to survive, this seemed to be also a natural choice. His mistake was he took this behavior to the extreme, to a degree that made him an evil. He believed in violence and abandoned basic trusts among people, which caused him to lose support.

But he was also a genuinely ambitious man. He did all the bad things but he also took the responsibilities (later, even Zhu Yuan Zhang wasn't able to). He was extremely talented in military and political affairs. He resisted the rule of the Yuan Dynasty from the start to the end. He never yielded to Yuan and stuck to the end.

Looking at from this angle, he seemed to be a man.

Unfortunately in that chaotic world, he remained just an ambitious man. The real hero was Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Some of the friends may have already noticed that Zhu Yuan Zhang now was no longer a poor peasant beggar. He already became a landlord. How did he turn into a landlord concerns

the question of the historical pattern of imperial China, on which we should have some discussion.

In previous chapters, I have mentioned this book is intended to introduce to everyone some of the stories and the systems of the Ming Dynasty in a leisurely way. Thus we also need to discuss some of the questions that require in depth discussions, so that we have a rational and systematic understanding of the Ming Dynasty. There will be many more discussions like this later.

Of course I'm going to describe in my own way. I believe any profound and abstract patterns and analysis of systems can be expressed in plain language and shared with everyone.

In imperial China, after the success of a peasant rebellion, those peasant leaders, whose aims were to evenly distribute the land, all became big landlords. Throughout thousands of years, China's history was none other than that the landlord surnamed Liu expelled the landlord surnamed Xiang and the landlord surnamed Li replaced the landlord surnamed Yang. There had been no exception, which seemed like an evil curse[48].

A thesis can be written to answer this question. The title of the thesis should be *On the Change of Production-Consumption Relations and the Repartition of Land Ownerships after a Peasant Rebellion*. Of course such a big thesis wouldn't interest you, which deserves a question mark. We're going to explain in a different way.

Becoming a landlord

For example, there is a peasant leader Zhang San[49], who mustered thirty thousand people after a rebellion is started. He occupies an area of land. One of the things he must do is eat. A peasant army is still an army, which consists of men, who must eat. Then how to feed thirty thousand people? At this time the most immediate method that Zhang San can use is to take the crops from the landlords. But the problem is the homes of the landlords are not ATM machines, which are inexhaustible. Once the landlords have been deprived of everything, what do they eat?

Landlords (this word should be emphasized) also don't have spare crops!

Now, what's left in Zhang San's hands is only land. But all the grains have been eaten up. He must gather the peasants and give them the lands. Then collect taxes from them. Thus the

[48] The surnames mentioned here are the family names of the empires of Han, Chu, Tang, and Sui dynasties. Han Dynasty's family name was Liu. Chu was not a dynasty, being a state that existed only a very short time after the Qin Dynasty collapsed. Xiang Yu declared himself to be the King of Chu but he was quickly deposed by Han. The family name of the Tang Dynasty was Li and the family name of the Sui Dynasty was Yang. Sui ruled China for about eighty years until it was replaced by Tang.

[49] Zhang San is a name generally used to mean no particular person.

peasant leader Zhang San has become the landlord Zhang San.

But in imperial China, there was no other choice. Someone was either a peasant or a landlord. Being a business man was certainly another choice but business men at the time weren't an independent political force. It was impossible for them to have their own political influences. You also couldn't count on a bunch of hungry peasants to argue for rights on behalf of business men. It was impossible for peasants in imperial China to ask for capitalism.

This tells us that behind every demand, there hides some sort of hidden force or group interest. For example, real estate developers must say housing prices will rise forever, just like telecommunications companies say their charges are very cheap. But the demands by peasants could only be either planting the fields or collecting taxes.

A well-known historian once said two thousand years of peasant rebellions were all about a piece of land!

Be either a peasant or landlord! There is no other choice!

Chapter Thirteen

Zhang Shi Cheng, the Next Target

Having fixed Chen You Liang as a problem, Landlord Zhu began to attack the wealthier Landlord Zhang.

Zhu Yuan Zhang and Zhang Shi Cheng were two who couldn't exist together under the same sky. What particularly puzzled Zhu Yuan Zhang was how he ended up being the biggest enemy of Zhang Shi Cheng's despite that in no way he caused troubles to the other.

Now Chen You Liang was finished. It was time to take care of the private salt dealer Zhang Shi Cheng.

Zhang Shi Cheng wasn't someone who would allow himself to get bullied so easily. By coincident, his nick name was also Ninety Four. Contrary to the rumored nick name of Chen You Liang, his nick name was explicitly recorded in official history books. He ruled and fought by relying on several of his brothers, Zhang Shi Yi, Zhang Shi De, and Zhang Shi Xin. Except Zhang Shi Xin, the other two were both very capable. But both of them died in battles. Now Wu, under the leadership of playboy Zhang Shi Xin, was already starting to go downhill.

It seemed this time Heaven's blessing was not there anymore.

In January of year twenty four of Utmost Justice (AD 1364), Zhu Yuan Zhang acceded to the throne as the King of Wu. He finally completed the transformation from a peasant to a noble man (he never held any title before). Actually, the harder the roads one takes, the more results one gets. In history records, to distinguish his Wu and the Wu of Zhang Shi Cheng, his Wu was called West Wu and Zhang Shi Cheng's Wu was East Wu.

But some historical records had words that said Zhu Yuan Zhang proclaimed himself as the King of Wu. After some careful research it can be found that two words "proclaimed himself" are worthy of study. Because Han Lin Er was now still the nominal emperor, it would require his approval if the King of Wu was to be enthroned. If there was an approval then it was legal. If Zhu Yuan Zhang enthroned himself, then it was an offense to authority and it meant he didn't receive the decree from Han Lin Er. Was Han Lin Er resentful and unwilling

to issue the decree to ordain Zhu Yuan Zhang? It is also a question worth studying.

In year twenty-five of Utmost Justice, after a thorough preparation, Zhu Yuan Zhang sent troops to attack East Wu.

Troops were sent out in August and in less than half a year, a large area in Jiangsu province, including such places as Xuzhou, Salt City, and Taizhou, was taken. It even included Gaoyou, Zhang Shi Cheng's original base.

It seemed he was about to kick away the last stumbling rock on his way to fight the decisive battle against Yuan, when an unexpected piece of news shocked him.

An unexpected betrayal

When he was campaigning in Jiangsu, spies told him that his own nephew, the meritorious Zhu Wen Zheng had hooked up with Zhang Shi Cheng and was preparing to launch a campaign against him.

Zhu Yuan Zhang had been betrayed before. In year twenty two of Utmost Justice, senior generals Shao Rong and Zhao Ji Zu conspired to murder him. The whistle was blown and Zhu Yuan Zhang executed the two. In year twenty three of Utmost Justice, when the battle against Chen You Liang was at the critical moment, senior general Xie Zai Xing defected. Zhu Yuan Zhang dealt with it in time and suppressed the mutiny.

But the betrayal by Zhu Wen Zheng pained him deeply. His own nephew, whom he most trusted and was an able general, had now betrayed him. Why, for what purpose?

Actually the reason was simple, it was all about position.

Zhu Yuan Zhang, after defeating Chen You Liang, offered rewards according to merits. Because Zhu Wen Zheng was his nephew and accomplished the most, he asked Zhu Wen Zhang what position he wanted. Zhu Wen Zheng exhibited magnanimity as a senior general and said to Zhu Yuan Zhang, we are relatives, you go ahead and reward others first, I'm not interested.

Upon hearing this, Zhu Yuan Zhang was ecstatic. He felt this nephew was a person of wisdom, knowing what was important and had a sense of higher purpose. He awarded good positions to others and still let Zhu Wen Zhang guard Jiangxi.

But he could not have known Zhu Wen Zheng was just polite to him. It was like the bidding in an auction house, he was waiting for Zhu Yuan Zhang to raise his bid and try harder to keep him and say something like you must not refuse. But he didn't expect Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't raise the bid and went ahead by putting down the gavel.

Deal!

Zhu Wen Zheng's discontent finally exploded. I did the most in defending Hongdu but nothing for me when merit awards were given. He couldn't get himself out of that thought and spent days in drinking. He even publicly seized civilian women and sold positions. But all these still couldn't satisfy and calm him. Every time he saw his subordinates flaunting in Yingtian and other fertile areas, while he could only guard Jiangxi, he was deeply resentful of Zhu Yuan Zhang. When this kind of resentment reached its peak, he inevitably went beyond the extreme.

Who else in the world is still able to compete against Zhu Yuan Zhang?

There is only Zhang Shi Cheng.

As he was busy preparing, Zhu Yuan Zhang got the wind of it.

He put down the work at hand and came to Hongdu.

He wanted to clean the house.

The meeting between Zhu Yuan Zhang and Zhu Wen Zheng was full of drama. Upon seeing Zhu Yuan Zhang, Zhu Wen Zheng was dumbstruck. But Zhu Yuan Zhang was not delirious at all. He showed his innate plain and simple personality. He didn't offer pleasantries such as, the weather today is good, or you look good. He didn't fake anything and whipped Zhu Wen Zheng personally. He also scolded as he was whipping. Rascal, what do you want to do?

Zhu Yuan Zhang initially intended to execute Zhu Wen Zheng. But persuaded by Empress Ma[50], he didn't do it but rather jailed him. Zhu Yuan Zhang treated Zhu Wen Zheng well. Later in year three of Martial Splendor (AD 1370), he bestowed the title of prince to the eight year old son of Zhu Wen Zheng and settled him in the remote Guiling.

No matter what, Zhu Wen Zheng was the one that erred.

The meritorious and talented general thus ended his glorious life just like that. He later died in prison. His tragedy stemmed from his personality. This man, who had military talent, didn't know how to behave as a man. He was eccentric, narrow-minded, and ill behaving. Even if he didn't trip on this matter, eventually he would be in trouble because of other things. Looking from this angle, his life was doomed to be tragic.

One's personality decides his fate!

But this incident put a big shadow in Zhu Yuan Zhang's heart. From now on he wouldn't dare to trust anyone. If his most trustworthy and most capable nephew had betrayed him, who

[50] Apparently the author made a mistake here. Zhu Yuan Zhang was not an emperor yet.

else could he trust?

For Zhu Yuan Zhang, the powder was already buried deep in his heart. It was just a matter of time before it exploded.

After settling this matter, Zhu Yuan Zhang went back to continue to deal with his old nemesis, Zhang Shi Cheng.

The war in year twenty five of Utmost Justice already pushed Zhang Shi Cheng outside of the northern area of the Yangtze River. The forces of East Wu cowered in the Jiang and Hang area, which is today's Suzhou and Hangzhou area. Zhang Shi Cheng still seemed not to understand his situation. He still wanted to occupy the so-called half of the country south of the Yangtze River and continue to be a rich landlord.

But Landlord Zhu's action told him there could only be one largest landlord in the world and this man must not be you, Zhang Shi Cheng.

In year twenty six of Utmost Justice (AD 1366), Zhu Yuan Zhang, with all of his best troops and Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun as his commanders-in-chief started a campaign against Zhang Shi Cheng.

An argument took place during the discussion of the battle plan. Chang Yu Chun thought they should directly attack Pingjiang (today's Suzhou), the original home base of East Wu. Xu Da agreed with him. Both of them thought if they took Pingjiang, all of the other Zhang Shi Cheng's areas would surrender without a fight.

Zhu Yuan Zhang disagreed.

Once again Zhu Yuan Zhang demonstrated his genius in strategic thinking. He believed if they attacked Pingjiang directly, Zhang Shi Cheng's forces in Hangzhou would definitely come to help. Then it would be very hard to take Pingjiang. But if they attacked Hangzhou and the other areas, they would be able to clip Zhang Shi Cheng's wings and Pingjiang would naturally become a thing in the bag.

Reality proved Zhu Yuan Zhang was indeed a military genius. He was right again.

Before starting out, Zhu Yuan Zhang repeatedly emphasized one thing. There must not be arbitrary killings after taking a city. If they killed all the people of a city, they would get an empty city, and it served for no purpose.

These words were not intended for Xu Da. They were for Chang Yu Chun.

After the incident in Mt Jiuhua, this fellow still couldn't change his bad habit. After taking a city he would certainly do the killings. Not until after many severe admonishments by Zhu Yuan Zhang, did he start to restrain himself.

The great army marched out. Zhu Yuan Zhang, sitting in his tent, had an unutterable feeling of excitement.

The world is soon going to be mine!

Again, this time Zhu Yuan Zhang mustered an army of two hundred thousand and asked Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun to command it. These two celebrated generals didn't disappoint Zhu Yuan Zhang. They divided their forces and coordinated to attack Hangzhou and Huzhou and soon took both.

Now, there was only Pingjiang left.

The assault on Pingjiang

Pingjiang was said to be the most fortified city. In recent years Zhang Shi Cheng stayed at home and watched the collapse of Chen You Liang. He saw territories slowly eating away by Zhu Yuan Zhang and did only one thing, which was to fortify the city.

The city of Pingjiang had eight gates. They were the Turnip Gate, Tiger Hill Gate, Aries Gate, Lesser Gate, Gate of Heaven, Loop Gate, West Gate, and North Gate. The walls around the gates were all extremely strong. They were built using large stone slabs mixed with glutinous rice. There were fixed positions for crossbows. Anyone who got close to the wall would be shot like a porcupine in an instant. There were also large quantities of provisions in the city, which were enough to last for several years.

Although Zhang Shi Cheng wasn't someone who strived for excellence, he was a man of strong will, which was demonstrated previously when Yuan mustered a million troops to attack the small Gaoyou and failed to take it in three months.

Thus now, Zhang Shi Cheng saw more clearly if Pingjiang was lost, he wouldn't have anywhere else to go.

He decided to fight, even to death.

A detailed plan was needed to attack a fortification of such kind. But when the subordinates of Zhu Yuan Zhang came to ask him which gate would be the focus of the attack, Zhu Yuan Zhang shouted to them, with an army of hundreds of thousands, do you have to distinguish which one is the main one to attack? Attack all of them with all you have!

It seemed that the Li Yun Long[51] a few hundred years ago wasn't the only one who used this tactic.

[51] The author seems to have made a mistake here. In Chinese pop culture, Li Yun Long is a fictional character, who is a general of the Chinese People's Liberation Army who fought before the communists took power.

Zhu Yuan Zhang deployed his forces. He fully utilized his celebrated generals and assigned tasks in details as follow:

Xu Da would attack the Turnip Gate, Chang Yu Chun would attack the Tiger Hill Gate, Guo Xing would attack the Aries Gate, Hua Yun Long would attack the Lesser Gate, Tang He would attack the Gate of Heaven, Wang Bi would attack the Loop Gate, Zhang Wen would attack the West Gate, and Kang Mao Cai would attack the North Gate. If you are dizzy, there are more!

He worried these men were still not enough and separately arranged Geng Bing Wen to attack the city's north east, Qiu Cheng to attack the south west, and He Wen Hui to attack the north west.

If we tally them up, he had deployed eleven divisions around Pingjiang to attack it from all directions. Even gods wouldn't be able to sustain this assault, not to mention men. In fact it wouldn't have to take a fight, with so many people they just needed to squeeze into the city and Zhang Shi Cheng would be crushed to death.

Zhu Yuan Zhang still felt it wasn't enough. He built long walls around the city and tightly surrounded it. More than just men even rabbits wouldn't be able to escape.

To solve the problem that the Pingjiang was on high ground and the inconvenience that soldiers had to attack by looking up, he started to build a new type of real estates, wooden towers, which had three stories. Standing on the towers, one would be able to see everything inside the city. He also installed crossbows, blunderbusses, and Xiangyang guns (a new kind of cannon) on the towers. What he did truly enabled him to attack anywhere at will.

Facing such sorts of paraphernalia, Zhang Shi Cheng would have surrendered if he recognized the situation.

But the salt merchant believed in only hard truth. He was determined to resist to the end.

In January of year twenty seven of Utmost Justice, the attack began.

For days and nights, without respite and in coordination, Zhu Yuan Zhang's infantry, archery, and artillery forces assaulted the city. Infantrymen attacked from below the walls and artillery troops shot missiles, bullets, and cannon balls from the wooden towers ceaselessly.

At the same time when Zhang Shi Cheng's troops had to withstand the attack from below the city walls, they also needed to look out in the air. The wooden towers were manned around the clock. When the soldiers on the wooden towers were on night duty, they were not allowed to come down the tower. They ate, drank, pooped, and peed on the tower. Of course when they had to spit or pee, everything was doused on the soldiers of East Wu on the parapets.

This was real misery. This was the ultimate humiliation of being forced to under someone's crotch!

In this kind of harsh circumstances, Zhang Shi Cheng and his soldiers, with amazing resolve, hung on for eight months. Not until September of year twenty seven of Utmost Justice (AD 1367), did Pingjiang fall.

The end of Zhang Shi Cheng

Zhang Shi Cheng had some backbones. At the time when the city fell he was still doing street fighting. Even after Zhu Yuan Zhang repeatedly declared if Zhang Shi Cheng surrendered, he wouldn't kill him and also would treat him and his relatives well. But Zhang Shi Cheng was determined to fight to death. After he killed all of his relatives, he prepared to hang himself. But he was saved by his generals and was then captured and sent to Yingtian.

On the boat to Yingtian, he kept his mouth shut and didn't say a word. Showing his unyielding determination, he refused to eat.

Zhu Yuan Zhang sent Li Shan Chang, one of his key officials, to interrogate Zhang Shi Cheng. Li Shan Chang chastised Zhang Shi Cheng severely, but failed to receive any response from his opponent.

From the beginning to the end, Zhang Shi Cheng looked at Li Shan Chang with eyes full of defiance.

His stares sent chills through the spine of Li Shang Chang, who was also furious for he wouldn't talk.

After seeing the show by Li Shan Chang, Zhang Shi Cheng uttered the only confession in the entire interrogation.

"You are nothing but a dog, get your master here!"

Exhausted of means, Zhu Yuan Zhang showed up.

He looked at this old nemesis of his, who had fought him for ten years. What kind of man is he?

I must defeat him completely and conquer him completely!

Thus he used a rare mild tune to persuade Zhang Shi Cheng to surrender. He hoped he would be able to move the man. But all he got was just one sentence:

"You are not better than me. I lost simply because Heaven cared for you, not for me."

Zhu Yuan Zhang was finally ticked off. He killed Zhang Shi Cheng and burned Zhang Shi Cheng's body into ashes. Grinding the bones and scattering the ashes, as was it called.

Zhang Shi Cheng was a man of resolute determination. He started from nothing and finally built up his power to rule a piece of land. But his weaknesses were just as prominent as his strengths. As one of the strongmen in the chaotic world, he had the inclination to be content with the small riches he gathered. He didn't see under that kind of circumstance, he was in a game of elimination. There could be only one victor.

If one can't be the son of heaven, he can't remain a man!

But he was still a man that deserved our respects. He was resolute in resisting the brutal rule of Yuan. Although he once surrendered, it was only a tactical move. He was not afraid when facing death and stuck to his beliefs until the last moment.

People who are not afraid of death deserve our respects!

Zhu Yuan Zhang finally cleared two big road blocks on his way forward. He was about to face his last opponent.

For him, only this opponent was his real foe and enemy.

Chapter Fourteen

Revenge

Fairly speaking, Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng were indeed his strongest opponents. But in terms of feelings, there was no hatred between him and the two. He even pitied them.

But Yuan was different. It was under the rule of this brutal dynasty that Zhu Yuan Zhang lost his parents and became homeless and alone. He became a vagabond and begged to stay alive and was forced to rebel.

In Zhu Yuan Zhang's heart, there was a deep hatred of Yuan etched into his bones.

It was not only a family vendetta, but also national animus.

In the wars to sweep out Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng, in order to lessen Yuan's attention, Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't make himself a king or an emperor. And he secretly expressed to Yuan that he wouldn't be hostile against Yuan. He also sent handsome gifts to Chagantemuer, one of Yuan's senior generals.

It seemed he was really good at manipulating relationships.

Yuan saw this man only a country bumpkin who wanted to fish for some scraps from the war. Thus giving him a little something would be good enough.

If they researched the miserable childhood experience of Zhu Yuan Zhang, and also studied who caused all those Zhu Yuan Zhang's miseries, they would find how ridiculous the idea was.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's strategy yielded him big successes.

Seeing he had eliminated Chen You Liang and was ready to sweep up the south of the Yangtze River, the Yuan government immediately sent Zhang Chang, the minister of revenue and population, to offer him a position. They thought the man could be used and all that would be needed was some money.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's reaction was totally unexpected by them. He resigned the post but kept

Zhang Chang. Not only did Zhu Yuan Zhang pull the rug under Yuan's feet, he also said to Liu Ji, Yuan sent a wise man to me, and whenever you have time you guys should chat with him.

They would be too stupid if this act still didn't cause Yuan to understand Zhu Yuan Zhang's real motive.

When Zhu Yuan Zhang was fighting against Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng in desperate battles, the Yuan government happily acted as a bystander of boxing matches. For them, the best result would be all three fell and then they would come up to declare themselves a winner.

The stupidity of the Yuan government rested in that they didn't see the matches were a game of elimination. The final reward for the victor was the qualification to fight decisively against Yuan.

Not until after so many trials and tribulations, when Zhu Yuan Zhang walked out from mountains of bodies and rivers of blood and rose aside the bodies of Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng, did the Yuan government realize in horror this victor was more frightful than any other opponent.

He had well trained forces, civilian advisors good at decision making, and valiant generals. What he led was not that kind of peasant rebel armies that would collapse under attack. The army was a strong force that was in no way inferior to Yuan's.

The Yuan government did everything possible in order to save their own lives. They sent large quantities of gold, silver, and other treasures to Zhu Yuan Zhang, hoping he would accept the amnesty and continue to be their slave.

But gradually they discovered this Zhu Yuan Zhang in front them wanted not only their money, but also their lives.

The match was about to begin!

Let's take a look at the players of the two sides. Now, let's first welcome the players of Yuan, and first, Emperor Obedience[52].

Now let's welcome Emperor Obedience to say a few words about how he feels now.

Emperor Obedience: I can only speak a few words? Then I'll say I hope that my opponents can be gentle, I am afraid of pain.

Now let's welcome player Zhu Yuan Zhang to tell us his thoughts. Oh, where is player Zhu Yuan Zhang?

[52] This title was bestowed on the Yuan emperor by Ming after his death.

Ah, we've found him. He is sharpening his knife. Well then, let's not bother him.

Now let the game begin!

Experiences of the players

Before the game starts, we need to introduce the opponent of Zhu Yuan Zhang, Yuan.

Yuan was a government created by Mongols. The Mongols became strong in the twelfth century[53]. In AD 1206, the Mongol leader Temujin unified the north of the Gobi Desert, which signified the start of the full development of the Mongolian era.

It should be noted that many people think the rise of Mongols started after Temujin. This idea should be put under scrutiny. Actually the fighting prowess of Mongols had always been strong. They were natural born fighters.

The reason this doughty people never appeared on the world stage was due to divisions amongst itself. Then once Temujin resolved the problem, its terrible and destructive war power poured to everywhere in the world like the torrential rains of a tempest.

It's not rare in history that culturally advanced peoples were conquered by culturally relatively less advanced peoples, such as the demise of Western Jin and Northern Song dynasties. But there is a blank spot, that people have always thought the reason that the culturally less advanced peoples could become the conquer was because their soldiers were brave and good at fighting, not because their military organizations were more advanced.

To these people, those barbarians who weren't even literate and could only rely on the so-called valiant fighting, that it was impossible for them to be better in military strategies than those who had been trained systematically on military theories in culturally advanced peoples.

Facts have shown they may be wrong.

The advancements of military and economic powers have been often separate. This statement has been proved true many times in history.

The Mongolian military organization was simple, but it was practical. There weren't those useless bureaucracies that existed in the Southern Song government. In battles, small cavalry units were used to probe first, and then sudden attacks were used to assault the enemy's weak points. If the attacks were thwarted, they withdrew immediately and then looked for opportunities in the flanks.

Being agile was the biggest advantage of the Mongol army.

What's even more unbelievable was the weapons of the Mongol army were also more

[53] Apparently the author made a mistake here. It should be the thirteenth century.

advanced than those of the Southern Song. They ingeniously invented the most powerful bow of the time. Its range could reach three hundred meters. Any armor, regardless how thick it was, couldn't stop the arrows. The only thing that could match against it was the Bow of Devine Arms, equipped to the most elite Southern Song troops. But in war, weapons have never been the most critical, instead, the soldiers in combat have been the key to win or loss.

Fighting against the Mongols was a very miserable thing because they wouldn't fight in contact using knives or swords. Their most important weapon was bows and arrows.

When you ran into Mongol cavalries, your nightmare had just begun. They shot before the attack began, shot during the attack, and even in a retreat, still kept shooting. You couldn't catch them and you couldn't touch them. This kind of roguish way of fighting would drive one crazy!

This was also the reason when later the Mongol armies invaded Eastern Europe, those Europeans, whose bodies were much better built and stronger than them, were beaten into pieces.

Basically they were not hacked to death by blades and swords. They were shot to death by arrows.

And massacring the populations of cities was another characteristic of the Mongols and was familiar to everyone.

The Mongols fought from East Asia to West Asia, then to Europe and always used the same method. Their way of massacring was peculiar and worth mentioning.

Based on various records (*Duosan's History of Mongolia* and *The Official History of Yuan*), the massacres conducted by Mongols were not the results of indiscipline by its armies. Their massacres carried apparent political significance (note this).

The purpose of the massacres was to subjugate the opponent.

Before launching the attack to a city, they would make it clear if the defenders didn't surrender, then there would be a massacre. If you don't surrender, the result would be upon yourself.

If the people didn't surrender, then they would massacre the people. But the wicked part was to those who surrendered, they still wouldn't let go. Why was this?

This was to ensure the safety of their rear. They thought leaving people behind was unsafe and wouldn't feel safe unless all were killed.

The tempestuous Mongolian flood enveloped the world. But Europeans seemed to be more spiritual and self-restrained. They thought these terrible guys who came out of nowhere were

the result of too much of their own sins. God was using his whip to admonish them. Thus they called the Mongols “God’s Whip”.

This was the second time the honorary title was awarded in Europe. The first time it was awarded to the King Attila of the Huns.

Historians have given a precise definition of the act of massacre done by the Mongol armies, State Sponsored Terrorism.

The Mongol armies seemed to also like some people who loved behavioral art, which was actually shown in the Battle of Western Asia, where the heads of those killed were cut off and heaped into a pyramid.

Besides, they were also rather capable of black humor. For example, after they took Baghdad, they put the supreme leader the Caliph in a house full of treasures and let him die of hunger.

They solved a worldwide problem for having to feed tens of millions of people, but used the most cruel method, massacre!

This was a terrible enemy, whose power of destruction was astonishing. Here we need to enumerate a few numbers.

These numbers make one shudder in terror.

The remaining population of the Jurchen Jin Dynasty after Mongols destroyed it was as follow:

At its peak (AD 1207) there were 7.68 million households. At the time when Yuan destroyed the Jin Dynasty (AD 1235), only 87 thousand households remained, which was a reduction of 89%.

The remaining population at the time when Mongols destroyed the Southern Song Dynasty was as follow:

In year sixteen of Well and Peaceful of Southern Song (AD 1223), there were 12.67 million households. After Yuan destroyed Song, there were 9.37 million households left, which was a reduction of 26%.

So it seemed the Mongols were relatively lenient to Southern Song. Of course there were some reasons, which we will discuss later.

The attacks to the states of central Asia by the Mongol armies were indeed fierce. It took them twenty two years (AD 1205-1227) to destroy Western Xia and twenty three years (AD 1211-1234) to destroy the Jin Dynasty, which had once swept the world.

Now the Mongols were aware of their own terrible strength. They aimed their next target

at Southern Song.

It seemed to them if the people of the Jin Dynasty, who were just as brave and strong as them, could be shattered without much effort, then what about those lean and weak southerners who did only poetry and painting?

In year first of Proper and Just of Southern Song (AD 1234), Mongols completed their preparations for attacking Southern Song.

They thought they would be able to destroy Song in ten years.

But disappointingly to them, the war lasted for fifty years and they also paid with the price of the life of a Khan.

Under the threat of massacring the entire city, those feeble southerners didn't seem to be afraid. From the Huai River areas to Xiangyang and Sichuan, they met fierce resistance.

They suffered their biggest setback in Hezhou[54].

In February of year seven of Preciously Blessed of Song (AD 1259), Mongke the Great Khan led his army to attack Hezhou in Sichuan. The battle lasted for five months. The defending general Wang Jian stubbornly held the Fishing City of Hezhou. He not only repulsed the attacks by the Mongol army, but also wounded Mongke the Great Khan in a battle.

What all had happened puzzled the Mongol nobles. What kind of strength supported the feeble men and made them so strong?

They decided to find the answer.

Although Southern Song resisted fiercely, eventually they still couldn't stop the ironclad cavalries of the Mongolian army.

In AD 1279, after a fierce resistance, Lu Xiu Fu, the last wartime prime minister of Southern Song, saluted to the child emperor Zhao Bing, and said his last words:

"With the country ends up like this, Your Majesty can do nothing but to sacrifice yourself to the country."

Then he carried the emperor on his back and jumped into the sea.

Southern Song perished but the mystery in the hearts of the Mongol nobles was still not solved.

Now, they found they could find the answer from one man.

The name of this man was Wen Tian Xiang.

[54] This Hezhou is apparently not the Hezhou mentioned before. In Chinese, they are different. But they have the same pingyin name.

Morality

By now Wen Tian Xiang had spent a long time in Yuan's prison. He raised a volunteer army to resist Yuan when Southern Song was in its most dire moment. He was captured after being defeated in a battle.

This was a man who would knowingly do what he knew he couldn't do and he was the man the Yuan rulers wanted to study. What propelled him to do such a thing that it was impossible for him to accomplish?

Thus from the surrendered Song prime minister to emperor and then the prime minister and emperor of Yuan, ever one came to urge him to surrender. But they all got the same answer.

Never surrender!

After a series of confrontations, the Mongol nobles found what was in the man's heart that had been sustaining him.

This thing is called morality!

What the heck is morality?

It can't be seen and touched. But the Mongol nobles grasped the point, that if they could subdue this man, they would be able to set an example, which would show that morality could be defeated.

Thus they used various methods to torture Wen Tian Xiang, from comfortable and warm rooms to stinky dungeons. From gentle to harsh, everything was put to use.

But Wen Tian Xiang wouldn't budge either way.

Under the harsh circumstances, Wen Tian Xiang held on to his belief and wrote the famous everlasting poem, *Ode to Righteousness*.

In it there are two sentences that showed his true belief:

At trying times virtue flourishes,
And all will be in people's memories.

Only at the most difficult times, can a man's virtue and dignity be shown.

Having exhausted all means, the Mongol nobles had to ask Kublai Khan to come out.

Kublai was a man who had been nurtured by the Chinese culture for a long time. He knew it would be simple to just kill Wen Tian Xiang but it would be difficult to conquer the belief in his heart.

He used a tune that sounded almost like begging and told Wen Tian Xiang. You are a real

talent. Please work for me as my prime minister.

Wen Tian Xiang refused him!

Kublai persuaded him again and again to no avail. Finally he ran out of ideas and asked Wen Tian Xiang: What do you want, I'll let you choose.

Wen Tian Xiang raised his head and said: I ask only for death!

Is it going to be bad by just remaining alive? Why must one die? What's so important about morality?

He admired the man but he didn't understand him.

Your wish will be fulfilled!

In AD 1283, Wen Tian Xiang was escorted to the execution ground of the Great Capital. When he arrived at the ground, there was countless number of people, who would witness the execution of the valiant and unbending man.

Wen Tian Xiang asked the last question of his life, which direction was south. At once people pointed it out for him.

He knelt down and saluted to the south. Then he sat down and calmly told the executioner: My affair is over.

That day, Wen Tian Xiang was the real winner!

With his own gallantry and resolution he showed to everyone that in a war, in which a person was resisting a state, he was the true and real victor!

Even till his death, he never gave up on his belief!

The Yuan rulers to the end still didn't find the answer.

Actually the answer was hidden in Wen Tian Xiang's self-appraisal sewn in his clothe. It was also his will.

> *Confucius said, for Benevolence, and Mencius said, for Righteousness. When Righteousness practiced to the max, Benevolence gains to the max. From books of the saintly and virtuous, what is to be learned? From now on to eternity, there is no regret.*

This was the ultimate oration that brightened the sun and the moon and inspired the mountains and rivers!

The action by Wen Tian Xiang demonstrated to all men that someone's body can be conquered but his moral cannot be.

This morality belonged not only to every individual, it also belonged to his country and his people.

Where the morality is, even over tens of millions of people, for which I would go!

We introduce Wen Tian Xiang not just for his greatness, there are also more important reasons.

As an exemplary character, Wen Tian Xiang's conducts and thoughts are worthy of study. As we have said before, in many things that seem have nothing to do with each other, there are deep connections. How Wen Tian Xiang conducted himself had all kinds of subtle connections with the emergence of many virtuous officials and the East Wood Party.

Thus the Yuan Dynasty began its rule under this circumstance. They didn't know what was in the minds of the people they ruled and they also didn't want to know. But as a model, Wen Tian Xiang was taken as a spiritual icon of the ruled.

This kind of rule would not be solid.

The Mongol nobles were careful to keep their own ethnic characteristics. They refused to become more Chinese and refused to marry Chinese (those of you who want to marry Zhao Min, forget it)[55]. The gap between them and the ruled became wider and wider and there was no way to reconcile. In addition, once a while there were a few nobles hooted for the expulsion of Chinese and using the land to raise cattle and goats. Fortunately it was stopped by Prime Minister Toto and the stupid idea didn't get implemented.

It needs to be noted here that this Toto was not the later Toto. This Toto in the beginning of Yuan was a genuinely kind man. It was due to his suggestion that the Yuan armies didn't massacre the local residents after they fell many cities. They instead didn't stop to progress toward an agriculture-based civilization. This man truly deserved the credit for his deeds.

Couple of other words is also necessary. Reading the history books on Yuan is a torturous matter. People's names often were the same. At every turn there is a Timur or Toto. I once wrote a limerick:

On each paper strip hung a Timur,
Upon each look everywhere is a Toto.

Just for fun.

In the big family of the Yuan Dynasty, the head of the family seemed to have no affection for the other members of the family. He would grab anything of interest. It seemed the family was not his own. This scenario continued for decades. Both sides didn't see each other eye to eye. If they couldn't get along, then they had to separate.

But the problem was the members of the family were the people who did the chores. If they went off, these Mongol nobles wouldn't be able to live. One side wanted separation and the

[55] Zhao Min is a fictional character in a modern Chinese martial arts novel.

other side didn't. Both sides wouldn't budge and domestic violence was the only recourse.

But these Mongol cavalrymen who once crisscrossed the world had sunken into a pleasurable life. Some of them couldn't even ride horses anymore. They didn't have any other skills other than bullying the members of the family who didn't have an inch of iron at their hands.

When the servants started to resist by taking up the household cooking knives and hoes, the rulers who once governed were at a loss at what to do.

For example, the Army of Asu, an elite army of Mongols, was an outstanding unit even among the doughty Mongol armies. It also achieved big accomplishments. When the rebellions erupted they were sent to put down. Upon receiving the order, the unit marched out immediately. It marched for days and nights, and in a lightning fast strike, plundered civilians first.

But their luck was bad. After the plunder and on the way back, they ran into the rebels. As soon as they saw the banners of the enemy, the leader of the unit shouted out "run, run". Just like this, the elite unit was defeated and had to retreat. Afterwards, they repeatedly claimed they were defeated because the rebels were several times of their size.

At the start of the rebellion, it was troops of this kind of quality that made the Yuan forces so vulnerable.

But with the spread of the rebellion, the Yuan rulers realized the seriousness of the problem. Blood of the Genghis Khan revived in their veins. They reorganized the army and the fighting ability skyrocketed. In succession they put down many rebellions around the country.

As long as we are on horse backs, we are still the children of the Great Genghis Khan.

Also when the Yuan Dynasty was in crisis, there also emerged some experienced and talented military leaders.

Among them the best one was Koko Temur.

He also had another more familiar name, Wang Bao Bao.

Koko Temur sounds too awkward to pronounce, let's just call him Wang Bao Bao.

Wang Bao Bao was the nephew and adopted son of Yuan's famous general Chaghan Temur. After Chaghan was killed, he took the responsibility to defend Yuan. He also became the main enemy of Ming.

For a long time this name will remain in our sight.

Yuan, the target!

Zhu Yuan Zhang finally was able to do what he wanted to do, destroy Yuan, and take revenge for his parents. And the slogan he used could more evoke the sympathy of the people.

"Drive out the barbarians, Restore China, Enact laws and demonstrate discipline, and Rescue the people". This was also what on many people's minds.

We make a reference to what the famous historian Wu Han[56] said to illustrate the circumstance at the time: "In this circumstance, the nature of the war changed. It was no longer a war for class struggle defined originally by the Red Scarf Army. It was an ethnic war between the Chinese and the Mongols".

Mongolians today are of course one of the peoples of China. But from the view of history materialism, the people at the time were not likely to have celebrations together with the Mongol cavalrymen.

Actually, the day that they had been waiting for had already arrived for a long time.

Yes, it was really like that at the time.

The northern expedition began

In October of year twenty seven of Utmost Justice (AD 1367), Zhu Yuan Zhang sent senior generals Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun on the northern expedition, which was of special historical significance. In the beginning of the tenth century, Shi Jing Tang[57], out of considerations of his own personal welfare and wealth, ceded the sixteen states, including Yan and Yun[58], of the northern strategic areas to Khitan.

This man could be named one of the ones that committed the gravest sins in Chinese history. His shameless conduct, despicable actions, and thick skins were all unmatched by anyone later.

This action of his put the states in the Central Plains[59] area at a great disadvantage in the military confrontations against the nomadic peoples. Because the Central Palins states had mainly infantries but the nomadic peoples had cavalries, after the sixteen states were ceded, the infantries of the Central Plains had to face the charges of the cavalries in plains of thousands of lis.

[56] Wu Han was a Chinese historian. He was born in 1909 and died in 1969.
[57] Shi Jing Tang was an emperor of one of the northern Chinese states in the early and mid-tenth century.
[58] Yan and Yun were two of the small states at the time. They were in the areas in present day northern Hebei in Chinese, including the present day Beijing.
[59] This is a general term for the region in northern China that includes the Henan province, and parts of the Hebei and Shandong provinces. The terrain in this region is flat. This is said to be where the Chinese civilization got started.

To a certain extent, the entire Song was ruined in the hands of Shi Jing Tang. Soldiers of the Central Plains had to resist the invasions of the nomads with flesh and blood until the collapse of the entire Song.

After losing Yan and Yun for four hundred years, Zhu Yuan Zhang started his northern expedition, which started a war of unification from south toward north, a rarity in China's history.

Zhu Yuan Zhang now faced a new decision, how to do the attack.

By now Zhu Yuan Zhang had already occupied the areas of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hunan, and Hubei. But Yuan still occupied larger areas in the north. To accomplish the target of overthrowing Yuan, there had to be a definite battle plan.

Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't choose the strategy to attack the Great Capital, the capital of Yuan. He thought that to completely defeat the Yuan rulers, Shandong and Henan must be taken first, then the Great Capital could be considered.

This strategy was proved to be correct because Yuan was still strong.

To prop up the moral of the troops, Zhu Yuan Zhang said a few words to his soldiers and generals before the start of the expedition.

"Blessed by heaven, China has the rights to make the truth known. Supported by the people, man has no revenge that cannot be fulfilled."

We can imagine Zhu Yuan Zhang gnashing his teeth when he uttered these words.

The northern expedition officially started with Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun, who could be said as twin jade pieces of the Imperial Ming Dynasty, as commanders-in-chief. They didn't disappoint Zhu Yuan Zhang. Experienced in brutal wars, in succession, the Wu armies broke Yuan defenses. It took them only three months to occupy Shandong.

There is really nothing to write about this process. The Yuan army was not even up to the slightest hit.

In Wang Bao Bao's eyes, Zhu Yuan Zhang and Xu Da were nothing. In his view, Xu Da's troops were no different from those beaten and undisciplined peasant troops of poor fighting capabilities. He took his main forces to deal with Li Si Qi, who was in a power struggle against him. He assigned the main task of defense to his younger brother Tuin Temur, who was a rather capable general. But comparing to the super capable generals Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun, he was still far off.

Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun used their military operations to teach him a class on military theory. In Jinan before he realized what was happening, he found the flags of the Wu army

were already erected all over the Shandong province.

Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun didn't pause. They started out from Shandong, divided their forces, and attacked Henan. Here they met the most stubborn resistance in their northern expedition.

The man defending Henan was Aluwin, the Prince Liang of Yuan. He was a more capable general. At the critical moment he correctly recognized the situation, mustered a force of fifty thousand, deployed on the northern bank of the Luo River, and waited for the arrival of the enemy forces.

It should be fair to say that he occupied a good position. The terrain brought two advantages to him. If the enemy forces dared to launch an attack by brute force, he would gather his force to beat the enemy in the middle of river crossing, which would catch the enemy off guard. Even if he was not successful, it would also be convenient for him to retreat and run away.

Reality showed that he fully utilized one of the advantages offered by the terrain, of course, it was not the former.

When Xu Da's army arrived at the Luo River, they didn't hesitate like what would be as expected by the Mongol army. Instead they launched an attack at the first moment and the organizer was Chang Yu Chun, forever the spearhead.

He led his force cross the Luo River like flying over it. The Yuan army looked at them with eyes gaping and jaws dropped. Before they had time to organize, the steel blade of Chang Yu Chun was already on their necks. Thus, "enemy was routed and we chased for more than fifty lis". Aluwin, the Prince of Liang, was taken prisoner.

Not until now did Wang Bao Bao feel frightened by his enemy.

But it was too late.

The founding of Ming

While Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun were campaigning in Shandong and defeating the Yuan forces, a new dynasty declared its birth in Yingtian.

On January 4th 1368, Zhu Yuan Zhang declared himself the emperor. The title of the reign year was Martial Splendor and the title of the dynasty was Ming!

Of course, before that, there must be a whole bunch of senior officials urging Zhu Yuan Zhang to take the throne. And the reaction from Zhu Yuan Zhang was naturally surprised and declined multiple times.

Officials were determined not to give up. Thus some kowtowed and some threatened with suicide (of course only orally). It seemed that if Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't become an emperor they would not be able to live anymore.

To not let his officials feel sad and save those who wanted to die, Zhu Yuan Zhang reluctantly took the throne.

Of course, eventually he would need to say something like I am forced and it's all because of your pressure. Note that when he was uttering these words, he needed to show an expression that's full of misery so that it seemed like he was about to be dragged out and executed.

Everyone should be already familiar with this kind of trickery in history. It had been this way in all imperial eras. But it wouldn't do without this kind of performance. Everyone had his needs. After the show, officials would get their positions and wealth. Zhu Yuan Zhang would be an emperor after the show. Everyone was a winner.

Regardless how we despise this kind of trick. Founding of dynasties had always had profound impacts on history.

On this day, the Ming Dynasty came into being. It would exist for two hundred seventy six years in its own unique way. It would also spread its influence to every one of us.

Its glories and splendors are shared by every one of us.

Its darkness and ugliness are borne by every one of us.

On January 4th of 1368, a date that would be forever remembered in history, on this day, a great dynasty came into being.

The boy cattle herder Zhu Yuan Zhang sat in his throne and looked at the military and civilian officials knelt down before him. His heart was filled with all sorts of emotions.

He didn't expect that this position would belong to him. Actually all he wanted in the beginning was just a meal, a family, a wife, and if he was lucky, cattle that would help him farm.

But the brutal reality forced him to choose a road, on which there was no one else to accompany him and all he could trust and rely on was only himself.

If I'm offered another choice and if I was able to feed myself and live, would I still take the same road?

All these were meaningless now. The boy cattle herder Zhu Yuan Zhang, no, we should now address him as Emperor Zhu Yuan Zhang, saw it clearly:

Once on this road, there is no way back!

Here, we need to explain about Han Lin Er. Now, where was the emperor before Zhu Yuan Zhang?

He was already at the bottom of a river for a year.

In AD 1367, Han Lin Er was on a ship to Yingtian and he was escorted by Zhu Yuan Zhang's general Liao Yong Zhong. Then there was an accident on the way and the ship sank. Afterwards, Liao Yong Zhong admitted it was his doing. But the question is, did he have Zhu Yuan Zhang's permission?

I think it was very probable. Zhu Yuan Zhang kept Han Lin Er so that he would be able to command the warlords in the name of an emperor. But after he destroyed Chen You Liang and Zhang Shi Cheng, he was in an awkward position.

If there were no warlords, what was the use of an emperor?

Later Zhu Yuan Zhang explained himself. He said he didn't have the intention and it was Liao Yong Zhong's own idea. He also publicly admonished Liao. If you bastard didn't do this, per your accomplishments, I would have conferred you the title of duke. Now to punish you, I'm going to only confer you the title of marquis.

This was really an absurd argument. Per Liao Yong Zhong's accomplishments, how could he be compared with Xu Da and Li Wen Zhong, and others, and conferred with the title of duke? I give you the title of a marquis, go enjoy yourself.

Regardless, Zhu Yuan Zhang had all he wanted.

Things weren't over yet, Zhu Yuan Zhang had one more enemy. He wouldn't be the real ruler of all China unless this enemy was destroyed!

After successfully taking Shandong and Henan, the Ming army advanced toward the last target, the Great Capital[60]. The Great Capital was the capital of Yuan and the center of Yuan government. If the Great Capital was taken, they would be able to declare the death of Yuan.

No doubt this was extremely attractive.

Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun were lucky. They got the job that would enable them to remain famous in history.

On July 27 of year one of Martial Splendor (AD 1368), Xu Da's army took Tongzhou and was pressing on to the Great Capital. The destination was right in front of their eyes!

As the capital of Yuan, the Great Capital had very strong fortification. Inside the city there were also large numbers of troops and quantities of provisions, which would allow them to resist for more than a year. Also, more importantly, not far from the Great Capital in Taiyuan,

[60] Now Beijing

a hundred thousand troops commanded by Wang Bao Bao were staring like a tiger and ready to serve the empire.

Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun fully recognized the problems and prepared themselves for various situations. So not until August 2, was the Great Capital surrounded.

But to their surprise, there weren't troops defending it and there also wasn't the emperor of Yuan. This fellow, upon hearing the news, already escaped on July 28, along with his wives and children.

It seemed few would not be afraid of death.

When Xu Da rode into the Qihua Gate, he didn't realize he had already made a heavy mark in history.

The Yan and Yun region that had been lost for four hundred years from the states of Central Plains was finally recovered. From now on it would offer protection against the nomad invasions like the arms of a mother protecting her child. Under its protection, Ming obtained the time and space for its political and economic developments, which made great contributions to the development and continuation of the Chinese people.

After the prospering Tang and the wars and unrests that lasted for four hundred years, a state from the Central Plains finally had actual rule of this large region. On this land, under the protection of Ming, peasants labored in farms, merchants travelled about places, and productivity continuously advanced.

This was an accomplishment that would be remembered forever in history!

The glory belonged to Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun. But it belonged more to Zhu Yuan Zhang!

Regardless if what Zhu Yuan Zhang did was right or wrong and regardless how Zhu Yuan Zhang would be evaluated later, the glory that belonged to him can't be taken away by anyone. His everlasting accomplishment cannot be denied by anyone!

Zhu Yuan Zhang, history would prove your greatness!

We need to point out that the name of the emperor of Yuan at the time was Toghon Temur. His posthumous name was The Obedient Emperor of Yuan. The name The Obedient Emperor of Yuan was not given to him by Yuan, rather it was given by Ming as a kind of ridicule to the emperor of the dying Yuan. On this point Zhu Yuan Zhang had a sense of humor. Because he abandoned the Great Capital and chose to flee, Ming thought him "obeyed the heaven" and thus named him The Obedient Emperor of Yuan.

After The Obedient Emperor of Yuan left the Great Capital and escaped to the Upper

Capital (now Kaiping, in Flag of True Blue in inner Mongolia). He continued to rule as an emperor. Historically it is called the Northern Yuan. Yuan, as a country wide government, ended.

Yuan as a dynasty was dead, but to Zhu Yuan Zhang and his generals, the challenge had just begun.

The real showdown, Wang Bao Bao!

After the Yuan Dynasty that had ruled the country perished, the Mongol nobles still attempted to reclaim the Central Plains by incessantly organizing counter attacks. The situation at the time was not optimistic for Zhu Yuan Zhang.

At the moment, Wang Bao Bao had more than a hundred thousand troops and occupied Shanxi and Gansu. Prime Minister Nayacu had more than two hundred thousand troops defending Eastern Liao[61]. There were also more than a hundred thousand Yuan troops in Yunnan. Even Korea was still under Yuan's rule.

This was like while Zhu Yuan Zhang was sleeping, there were a bunch of people with knives and clubs in their hands and ready to strike him at any moment.

Under such a situation, Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun started their offenses again. This time their target was Wang Bao Bao.

Now the Yuan armies finally learned the hard lessons and reorganized the troops. The Obedient Emperor of Yuan also recognized the capabilities of Wang Bao Bao and offered all military command to him. Wang Bao Bao finally got the command he dreamed for. He would now have all the legitimacy and authority to command the well trained Yuan troops to have a showdown against troops commanded by Xu Da, who was the foremost celebrity general of Ming.

After Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun took the Great Capital, they divided their forces. Chang Yu Chun went south to Baoding to attack Shanxi from the north.

Xu Da's troops marched toward Zhangde to attack from the south. They expected to unite to attack Wang Bao Bao in Taiyuan and destroy him in one battle. Because the usual vanguard Chang Yu Chun now became the commander-in-chief of the northern army, Tang He was now the vanguard of Xu Da's army. Without Xu Da's permission, he rushed on by himself and took Zezhou. It seemed to him that Shanxi would be taken in no time!

The reality was they very much underestimated Wang Bao Bao.

[61] Now areas in northeast China including the Liaoning province.

This was exactly the moment Wang Bao Bao was waiting for. He took advantage of the opportunity that Tang He was alone, gathered a large number of troops overnight, and launched a stealthy attack against Tang He in Handian of Shanxi. Tang He's Ming troops suffered a bad defeat and thousands of casualties.

Xu Da's army was in a difficult situation. This was his first confrontation with Wang Bao Bao, who later would become his old nemesis.

Then, The Obedient Emperor of Yuan suddenly didn't want to obey anymore. After coming back to the Upper Capital, what he saw every day was just the grassy plains and deserts. A metropolitan life was better. He regretted fleeing from the Great Capital. The victory in Handian encouraged him. It seemed that the Ming army was not that formidable. Thus he ordered Wang Bao Bao to muster the main forces and retake the Great Capital from Juyongguan!

Wang Bao Bao made careful preparations and battle plans and led one hundred thousand troops to attack the Great Capital. But in his mind he had two options. If Xu Da wouldn't go to help, then he would take the opportunity to take the Great Capital and welcome the Yuan emperor to reseat the throne. If Xu Da would come to help, he would wait, set a trap, and ambush Xu Da.

This would be a perfect plan. Regardless what Xu Da did, he would always be the victor.

But Xu Da chose a third option. An option that would let him not know if he should laugh or cry.

Upon receiving the news that Wang Bao Bao was going to attack the Great Capital, Xu Da calmly analyzed the situation and saw what's on Wang Bao Bao's mind. He decided to deliver him an unexpected surprise.

OK, if you want to attack the Great Capital, I'm going to attack your Taiyuan!

Xu Da thought the Great Capital was defended by a large number of troops and its fortification was strong, so there was not much to worry about. Even under extreme circumstance that the city was lost, he would just take it back. He could afford the loss. But it was different for Wang Bao Bao. He went out with everything he had and Taiyuan became an empty city. The main forces of Ming were very near Taiyuan. If Wang Bao Bao lost Taiyuan, he was left only with the possibility of herding goats in the north. Thus he immediately led his cavalry to attack Taiyuan.

Actually Xu Da's target wasn't Taiyuan, but Wang Bao Bao. He believed Wang Bao Bao would return.

That was just what happened. Wang Bao Bao heard the news and was very surprised. He

immediately got his cavalry of one hundred thousand to return to reinforce Taiyuan. His speed of return was fast and ran into Xu Da's near Taiyuan.

Now Xu Da's force was mainly cavalry and the main infantry force was still on the way. He had only half of the number of Wang Bao Bao's troops.

The two armies of cavalry thus met like this. This was also the first large scale engagement between the cavalry from a state from the Central Plains and the Mongolian cavalry.

How to beat cavalry

Throughout history, cavalry had been one of the most powerful armed forces. With the help of horses, a weak infantry force became a highly mobile sudden attack force. But unfortunately, in Chinese history, except in just a few dynasties, their military forces were all mainly infantry, which made them greatly vulnerable when facing cavalry.

But cavalries were not unbeatable. Actually the heavily armored ancient Roman infantry was able to use formations of lancers to subdue cavalries. But the Chinese never acquired the habit of wearing heavy armors of dozens of kilograms. In addition, there was no communications between the east and west. The Chinese had their own methods. They continuously studied the methods to use infantry to check cavalries. One of the successful ones was Zhuge Liang[62].

The Shu troops commanded by him were a nightmare for Cao Cao's troops.

He invented various sorts of weapons to impede cavalries. First there were horse hindering nails. This thing had a unique design. Regardless how you throw it to the ground, there's always a side standing upward. Before a battle, the nails were spread in the areas that would be charged by cavalry. When the horses came, the hoofs would be pricked. The use of it is very similar to what the bicycle repairmen do today by sprinkling thumbtacks on roads. Of course, the only difference is when horse hoofs are pricked, there is no one to do the repair.

The next trick is big carts. Zhuge Liang's troops were all equipped with wooden vehicles. When they saw cavalry, they put the wooden vehicles in front of the infantry to block the charge of the cavalry. This could be considered a wooden-mechanized force.

The most vicious was the third trick, which was also Zhuge Liang's most brilliant invention. Chained crossbows are just like the machine guns of that time. According to history records, this kind of chained crossbow emitted ten arrows in one shot. It was capable of great damages. Thus the cavalry of Wei were very afraid of confronting Shu troops.

[62] Zhuge Liang was a well-known political and military leader in the Three Kingdoms era. He was the prime minister of the State of Shu after Shu became one of the three kingdoms.

But this method required too sophisticated operations and it was not suitable for offense, thus its use was limited.

When time progressed to Song there were combats with Western Xia and Liao and for a long time infantries couldn't match up against cavalries. To change this kind of disadvantage, some genius, by a slap to the head, came up with an idea to build a large square formation, which was given an academic name, the so-called "anti-cavalry infantry".

It was brought to combat and the result was it could neither fight nor flee. It was not until when the talented general Yue Fei[63] appeared and organized the professional cavalry Yue's Army, would the Central Plains states be able to exhale with relief and defend against the attacks of the cavalries of the Jin Dynasty.

When time progressed to Yuan, the Mongol armies that traced their origin to cavalries greatly advanced the tactics of cavalries. They relied on these tactics to sweep the world. They proudly thought that as long as they had horses, they wouldn't need to worry about the overthrow of their rule.

While those awe-inspiring and pompous Mongol cavalries rode like wind on the state highways and the ordinary southerners on the road sides could only bend down and stay out of the away, those who bent their heads were not only thinking about where to hide, many of them also believed there must be a way to defeat these cavalries, there must be away.

Actually it was a simple way, but the implementation of it was very difficult.

Charge! Cavalry against cavalry

Looking at the powerful Central Plains dynasties, they all had strong armies of cavalries. Ming at this moment was so too, both Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun were very capable cavalry commanders. They knew how to coordinate the use of cavalry and accurate in selecting the direction of a breakthrough. They were very adept at using cavalry.

In the more than ninety years rule under the Yuan Dynasty, the people of the Central Plains were learning from their enemy, the Mongol cavalry, about using cavalry and the tactics to defeat cavalry.

After a long accumulation of knowledge and waiting, the people who took arms against the rule of Yuan finally came to the front of the stage and to duel against their teachers, the Mongol cavalry. And Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun were the ones that represented the best of them.

[63] Yue Fei was a Southern Song general who fought against the Mongol invasion. He was charged for treason and executed after losing a power struggle.

Now, they were facing Wang Bao Bao, the most ferocious general of the Mongol army.

On December 1 of year one of Martial Splendor (AD 1368), Xu Da led his Ming army to outside of Taiyuan and stood facing Wang Bao Bao's army, which was returning to reinforce Taiyuan. But because his troop strength was inferior to that of Wang Bao Bao's, Xu Da didn't launch an attack. Wang Bao Bao didn't know what Xu Da's intention was. He rushed back just in time and foiled Xu Da's attempt of a sneak attack against Taiyuan. But Xu Da neither attacked nor withdraw, which was really hard to understand. Thus for the moment he also didn't risk to make a move.

On December 4, after three days of observation and pondering, Chang Yu Chun told Xu Da his idea: "Our infantry is not here yet, if we use our existing cavalry to attack the enemy in the front, we're going to suffer more casualties. It's better to raid the enemy camp in the night."

This suggestion was undoubtedly correct. Chang Yu Chun deserved his name as a celebrity general in a generation. He saw things in his unique way and his judgments were accurate. It seemed that Heaven was also helping Xu Da. Just at this moment, Hobema, the commander defending Taiyuan, sent a representative to offer surrender and also expressed his willingness to act as an insider (he would be counted a Mengjian)[64].

Everything was ready, horses were fed and knives polished, and all that left was to take action in the night.

On that night, Wang Bao Bao wasn't sleeping (lucky him). The learned man was now sitting in his tent reading military books under the candle light. Suddenly he heard shouts erupted outside and knew something was wrong. He was quick to a decision and without hesitation decided to flee. He was in such a hurry that he ran outside of the camp with one foot bare. He mounted on a horse and rushed out of the camp.

Don't ask about that army of one hundred thousand, I even gave up my shoe, how am I supposed to care about my troops? Thus you can see a famous general is famous for a reason. He knew how to assess the situation. After all, one's life is the most important thing. This is what is so-called it's easy to get thousands of troops and hard to get a good general.

But the one hundred thousand troops that lost its commander had become a headless fly. Forty thousand of them became casualties and the remainder fled. In one breath Wang Bao Bao, escorted by his body guards, ran for nearly a hundred lis. But Chang Yu Chun didn't want to give up on him.

[64] During Japanese occupation of China in World War II, many Chinese collaborated with the Japanese and these Chinese were called Hanjian (Traitors of the Chinese), the word Jian literally means traitor. Hanjians are probably the most derogatory word in Chinese to describe someone who betrays his country. Thus the transformed use of the phrase here is meant to describe the seriousness of treachery committed by the Mongol general.

Chang Yu Chun had a deep understanding of the principle that one must eliminate evils completely. He attacked through the night. Wang Bao Bao could only moan and groan. He fought as he retreated. Once he arrived at Datong, he had only eighteen body guards with him. Without a respite, not until he reached Xinzhou, did Chang Yu Chun stop and withdraw.

This was a complete annihilation and also the first major victory by the Central Plains cavalry against the Mongol cavalry.

The moon is dark and geese fly high,
The Hun chief escapes under the night sky,
Mount a light horse to give chase,
With heavy snow covered bows and blades![65]

After taking Shanxi, Xu Da and his troops continued on to take Shaanxi. At the time Shaanxi was defended by forces led by landlords like Li Si Qi and Zhang Liang Bi. In China's history, because of the terrain, usually attacking Shaanxi from Shanxi had always been an extremely tough job. From early when the State of Qin defended the Hanguguan to resist the other six states to later the invasion of China by the Japanese, who exhausted their last breath but still couldn't step a single foot into Shaanxi.

But this time the circumstance was different.

Li Si Qi was experienced in fighting but he didn't want to fight. He wasn't emotionally attached to Yuan. His real purpose in organizing forces to resist the rebels was to prevent the poor peasants to rob him of his crops. Thus when Xu Da's army attacked, he retreated again and again until to Lintao, where he surrendered, knowing his part of the act was over and he had gotten good enough reason to explain to the Yuan government. But Zhang Liang Bi and his younger brother Zhang Liang Chen didn't have the right sense about the current affairs. They surrendered and then defected, resisted stubbornly in Qingyang, and later put down by Xu Da. After all they had done they failed in causing any real trouble.

Thus Shaanxi and Shanxi were quelled down. Large parts of the regions in northern China were now in the hands of the Ming army, which provided the basis for the ensuing showdown with Yuan.

A new dynasty always had the tendency to completely and forever eliminate the old dynasty. For example, the remnants of the Southern Song army fled to Mt Ya (now Xinhui of Guangdong province), the Yuan army didn't want to let them go and forced them to the sea to have them all eliminated. Times changed and this time it was Zhu Yuan Zhang's turn.

The Obedient Emperor of Yuan didn't like the desolate the Upper Capital (Kaiping), and

[65] This is a famous poem by a Tang poet and military general and it is very well known to Chinese readers. Thus the author is using it here without giving an explanation.

wanted to return to the Great Capital, but Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't even want him to stay in the Upper Capital.

In June of year two of Martial Splendor, Chang Yu Chun launched the northern expedition. But he never thought this would be his last expedition.

The one on the same expedition with him was Li Wen Zhong. The two led eighty thousand infantry and ten thousand cavalry to start the expedition. Under the unique way of sudden attacks used by Chang Yu Chun, the Yuan army didn't have anything against the beating. The northern expeditionary forces attacked Jinzhou first and defeated Yuan general Jiang Wen Qing. Then they attacked Quanning and defeated Yuan's Prime Minister Yesu. The troops didn't stop, attacked Daxingzhou, defeated the Yuan forces, and captured Yuan's Prime Minister Tohoci.

In the short time of just one month, the defense line that had been carefully designed and claimed to be able to last for twenty years was shown as feeble as tofu in front of Chang Yu Chun. The first vanguard of Ming showed his invincible power in the last battle of his life. Without a respite, he and his cavalry advanced to the Upper Capital!

The Obedient Emperor of Yuan was in the Upper Capital at the time. Upon hearing the Ming army was approaching, he fled, fully utilizing this unique skill of him. He brought his wives and children with him and ran all the way to Yingchang (now Lake Dalaichuer in inner Mongolia) in humiliation. On his way of escape, he ought to have been able to experience how the Song emperor a hundred years ago felt. Actual events later proved this wouldn't be the last time he had to move.

Chang Yu Chun always liked chasing his enemy to the end. He chased for dozens of lis and killed Qing Sheng, the Prince of Zong, and Governor Ding Zhu. He also captured ten thousand Mongol soldiers. While fighting, Chan Yu Chun also took something else. He took home all the Yuan emperor's lares and penates, including three thousand horses and fifty thousand heads of cattle.

There wasn't any suspense in this battle and there also wasn't fierce fighting. This was not because the Yuan army was weak but because Chang Yu Chun was too fast. He was like a smart swordsman. He held the sword in his hands and before his opponent even had the time to react, the sword was already sticking toward the heart of his opponent! This kind of opponent would be really terrifying.

Chang Yu Chun returned triumphantly. On the way in Liuhechuan, he fell ill suddenly and died at age 40.

Laugh not when I lay drunk in the battle field,

Since ancient times how many have returned from battles![66]

Looking at Chang Yu Chun's career, from his volunteering for action in the battle of Taiping, to the northern expedition to the deserts, he had been invincible. He proved himself in action that he was a real military genius, a genuine first vanguard. His life was like a bright comet, short but splendid. His military ability and accomplishments would forever be applauded.

While Chang Yu Chun was on his northern expedition, Xu Da was also fighting hard in the Center of the Gaps[67]. He sent his divisional commander Zhang Wen (very capable) to attack and take Gansu. Zhang Wen made good progress and quickly took Lanzhou and other cities. While Xu Da was winning victory after victory, danger was also getting close to him.

Wang Bao Bao's plan

After being defeated and forced back to Taiyuan, Wang Bao Bao didn't take major military actions. He was observing Xu Da's movements. After the first two confrontations, he clearly saw the opponent facing him was a formidable one. If there was no good opportunity, he would absolutely not go out to attack.

In a fight between pros, one must avoid getting too antsy. Wang Bao Bao's intuition told him for now he could only wait.

Having found out that Zhang Wen had taken Lanzhou and was now deep out and alone, Wang Bao Bao, who had been sleeping at home, sensed his opportunity had arrived.

He immediately mobilized one hundred thousand troops and divided them into two armies. He first sent tens of thousands of infantry and cavalry to attack Lanzhou. But Lanzhou was not his final target. Instead it was just bait. He hid his main force of a hundred thousand in Dingxi, a key location with better terrains. In military tactics, this is so-called enveloping a stronghold but attacking the reinforcement.

He believed in his assessment. Lanzhou was too important for the Ming forces and they must send reinforcement. All he had to do now was to wait for the fish to eat the bait.

His assessment was not wrong. Very quickly the first fish came.

After learning Lanzhou was surrounded, Ming general Yu Guang came to help. When he

[66] Another Tang poem well-known to Chinese readers.

[67] This is a region that had been perhaps the most important area in China's political and military history. Along the tributaries of the Wei River, it stretches for three hundred kilometers in the middle of Shaanxi province. It is surrounded by mountain ranges in the north and south and there are four mountain gaps guarding the region. Its rich soil and mild climate make the region one of the most prosperous regions in ancient China. Many dynasties grew out of this region. Here, instead of using pingyin to translate the name of the region, I am using a literal translation that signifies the geographical feature of this area.

arrived to near Lanzhou he found out he was surrounded by the Yuan army. After a hard fight, his army was annihilated and Yu Guang died in battle.

Wang Bao Bao finally got his first victory of his plan. But there was also one thing he didn't expect, the ability of Zhang Wen, Lanzhou's defending commander.

When tens of thousands of troops fully surrounded Lanzhou, Zhang Wen didn't panic. He analyzed enemy's situation and decided correctly that he should attack. He personally led three thousand men in a sudden raid on the tens of thousands of enemies outside the city, managed to defeat them, and pushed them back dozens of lis, which bought time for the battle in Dingxi later.

Of course except this incident that took Wang Bao Bao by surprise, everything else was still going as planned. He continued using the same method and waited for the second fish to take the bait.

The second fish indeed came, but it was a shark.

Wang Bao Bao's military actions attracted the attention of Zhu Yuan Zhang. On January 3 of year three of Martial Splendor, Zhu Yuan Zhang convened a military conference. He saw clearly Wang Bao Bao's attempt and made an even more sophisticated plan.

The plan was as follow. First, Xu Da was named the senior general for the expedition against barbarians, Li Wen Zhong the left deputy general, Feng Sheng the right deputy general, Deng Yu the left assistant deputy general, and Tang He the right assistant deputy general. At the time the Obedient Emperor of Yuan was in Yingchang. Zhu Yuan Zhang was a man who would not do something if he wasn't sure about its success. He wanted to move the Yuan emperor even farther. It would be the best if he could be pushed far back to Siberia. But if that was not possible, he would at least not let him live comfortably.

He ordered to not to reinforce Lanzhou, but rather asked senior general Xu Da to directly attack Dingxi from Tongguan and seek a decisive battle with Wang Bao Bao. The other army, led by left deputy general Li Wen Zhong, was ordered to enter the desert from Juyongguan to attack Yingchang to help the Yuan emperor to move his family.

At the same time, to confuse Wang Bao Bao, he also ordered senior generals Jin Chao Xing and Wang Xing Zu to attack the Yuan forces in Shanxi and northern Hebei. This was designed to attract the attentions of the Yuan forces and thus help the attacks by the main force.

The plan could be said as perfect without any flaw. Wang Bao Bao indeed didn't recognize Zhu Yuan Zhang's plot. He still stayed in Dingxi, waiting for rabbits by the tree[68].

[68] In a Chinese fable, a lazy man once saw a rabbit running into a tree and thus inferred that he didn't have to hunt for rabbits anymore and could just wait for more rabbits to crash themselves to the tree.

Unfortunately his opponents were Zhu Yuan Zhang and Xu Da, not rabbits.

In February of year three of Martial Splendor (AD 1370), the four armies marched out simultaneously. All at once, military reports were sent to Wang Bao Bao. The situation was chaotic. On the 25, Wang Bao Bao got that news that Jin Chao Xing had taken Dongshengzhou. On March 23, he learned also that Wang Xing Zu had taken Shuozhou, and Li Wen Zhong was already out of Juyongguan. Just when everything was in disarray, his real enemy was closing in.

On March 29, Xu Da and his troops arrived in Dingxi. Wang Bao Bao now had nowhere else to go but to fight to the end.

Sheneryu of Dingxi would be the battlefield for the showdown.

Wang Bao Bao's response

This time, Xu Da had nearly four hundred thousand troops to attack Wang Bao Bao. To get better results of a surprise attack, Xu Da took command of one hundred thousand men and marched continuously day and night toward Dingxi. The Yuan army was prepared for combat. But what ensued put them in a misty cloud.

After arriving, Xu Da's one hundred thousand troops didn't show any sign for combat. On the contrary, the first things his army did were felling lumbers and building houses and camps. The Yuan troops were greatly confused. Are they going to settle down here for good?

Commander Wang Bao Bao understood Xu Da's intention and couldn't suppress his admiration that Xu Da was a learned man of military tactics. Wang Bao Bao's purpose of staying in Sheneryu was to lure the enemy to attack a strong fortification and then seek opportunities for counter attacks. But Xu Da wouldn't fall into the trap. He would settle down first and then deal with him later.

This man is not going to be easy to deal with.

What frustrated him more was that, after arriving on March 29, the Ming troops didn't rush to launch a battle, but rather used only small units to probe him, which greatly annoyed the Yuan troops. On April 5, the situation got worse.

Starting from April 5, Xu Da divided the soldiers into three groups, which rotated to continuously set fire and launch raids into Wang Bao Bao's camps. If they didn't do these, they were not idle either. They beat drums and gongs outside of the Yuan camps, some even sang like they were going to perform in a play. The Yuan troops were tired and hungry due to lack of rest. They were enraged and wanted to attack, but mindful of the enemy's strong fortification they could do nothing but remain irritated.

Wang Bao Bao couldn't sit still any longer. He knew if it continued like this, his troops would collapse by just exhaustion if not by combat. He had to go out to attack.

On the 6th, Wang Bao Bao, helped by a local guide, found a small trail that led to the flank of the Ming army. He sent an elite unit of one thousand to suddenly attack the Ming troops, which didn't expect the Yuan army could have suddenly appeared here and immediately fell into a great confusion. The commander guarding the left flank panicked and left his command post. The Yuan troops were able to charge into the camp. Ming troops were about to fall into disarray. Now Xu Da was in the tent at the center and heard the noise outside. He didn't panic like Wang Bao Bao did, but instead listened to the commotions. Relying on his military intuition he guessed this was just a raid by a small unit. Riding his horse, he went to the flank. With sword in his hand, he commanded the troops. Seeing his silhouette, soldiers rallied and repelled the Yuan troops.

In an emergency being able to correctly assess the situation and respond is the most important quality of a commander. Xu Da deserved his resounding name as a celebrity general.

After the Yuan troops retreated, Wang Bao Bao thought the Ming troops would curb its activities. But unexpectedly, right after the troops came back to their camps, the Ming troops started the shows again. This time Wang Bao Bao was really out of ideas. During the night he wasn't able to sleep and could only smile bitterly and watch the Ming soldiers doing their shows.

Actually they won't be annoyed any longer because the Ming army already achieved its goal. They were about to take action.

The noises tired the Yuan troops. Yet they could do nothing to stop it. Then, on April 7, the commotions that had been going on suddenly stopped. The Yuan soldiers were very happy and all started to take rest, although they knew in their hearts that this kind of silence was unusual. But the misery after suffering from prolonged sleep deprivation was too great for them to bear, thus one by one they fall asleep.

In the meantime, when the Yuan troops started to rest, Xu Da, who had been waiting for the moment for a long time, was reviewing his troops. The long wait was designed just for this evening! He knew clearly tonight was the best and only opportunity. Wang Bao Bao occupied the advantageous terrain and had a hundred thousand men. But he came from far away and his provisions could not support him for long. This opportunity must be fully grasped. If they could not defeat the enemy in one battle, the eventual loser would be him. To ensure victory, he made a decision.

Maximizing the fighting ability of the soldiers is the responsibility of the commander.

Usually generals use their strategy and military movements to achieve this goal. But when the combat is at the most critical moment and when all the military wisdoms are all useless, generals have only one thing left, they need to go into the fight themselves.

Before setting out, Xu Da placed his unit at the front to ensure that all the soldiers would be able to see his commander's flag. Regardless where the soldiers would be fighting, as long as they could see the flag they would have the courage to fight on.

This is a means when there's no other means, and this is also the only means.

Thus there are five kinds of victors:
Those who know when to fight and when not to fight,
Those who know who is strong and who is weak,
Those who fight together from generals to soldiers,
Those who are well rested against not well rested,
Those who are able and their superiors don't restrain them
- from Sun Tzu's Military Strategies

Xu Da had all five, how could he not be victorious!

While the Yuan troops were sleeping, Xu Da launched a sudden raid by attacking right in the front center. The Yuan troops were really tired. Some of the soldiers couldn't get up despite hearing the shouts. They obediently became prisoners. Led by Xu Da, Ming troops were like roaring thunder and completely destroyed the Yuan army. An army of one hundred thousand thus disintegrated and collapsed.

At the moment Wang Bao Bao was resting in the camp. Reality proved he was really talented in running away. The fellow reacted quickly even amid great commotions. He grabbed a horse, carried his wife and children along the way, and fled north. Being able to take care of everything amid chaos, he deserved out admiration.

In this battle, the Ming army completely defeated the Yuan army. Yuan's Prince of Yan, Prince of Ji, and one thousand nine hundred civilian and military officials all were taken alive, together with eighty four thousand (a horrible number) Mongol soldiers. Wang Bao Bao suffered a total annihilation again. This time, he didn't even have the eighteen body guards with him. With only his wife and children, he escaped to the bank of the Yellow River. He could only sob when he thought about the miserable situation.

Many history books stopped here, which is not logical. Since Wang Bao Bao had neither wings nor motor cycles, he wouldn't be able to fly across the Yellow River. Thus it wouldn't be nice to just leave Wang Bao Bao here. In fact if some of the details in history are examined, many interesting things can be discovered.

By carefully analyzing the process that Wang Bao Bao went through to cross the Yellow

River, we can see it is very important for us to learn more skills at our spare times.

After arriving at the bank of the Yellow River, there were no boats for the river crossing. But a celebrity general wouldn't be stopped by such problems. Out of nowhere he found a piece of timber. He put his wife and children on the wood and hugged it tight. In such a way the whole family, old and young, crossed the river.

From this we can deduce that Wang Bao Bao must be really good at swimming, in addition he must also have the capability to maneuver a boat. Dingxi was in Gansu and the upper tributary of the Yellow River. The speed of the water was fast and even by boat it wouldn't be easy to cross. But he managed to cross by just hugging a piece of wood, which was an extraordinary ability. He was really a man of many talents.

Climbing up the river bank and looking at the scenery across the river, Wang Bao Bao's heart ached and filled with grief. Not long ago, he had a huge army, now he had only himself , his wife, and children left.

In an instant an army of one hundred thousand was destroyed!

After saying farewell to the other side of the river, he found a horse and went to Helin (present day southwest of Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia). In there he would be able to rise again.

It's not over yet. I will still have my chance.

While Wang Bao Bao was being defeated, Li Wen Zhong was helping the Yuan emperor to move. Since he exited Juyongguan, he had defeated Yuan's defense minister Manzi (not a nick name)[69] and Governor Shabutingerdochibaci (a rather long name), who were blocking his advance, in succession. He also retook Kaiping. On May 21, he arrived at Yingchang, the home of the Obedient Emperor of Yuan.

The Yuan emperor was indeed a pitiable person. Since year two of Martial Splendor (AD 1369) he had been forced to move constantly. After having lived only in Yingchang for just a few months, he died. He was an emperor who was mortified and humiliated. But before there could be a funeral ceremony, the old acquaintance Li Wen Zhong came without an invitation. This time Yuan stood up against him and wanted to defend the city. But strength was needed to defend the city, not to mention that the one attacking was Li Wen Zhong.

Li Wen Zhong didn't try to be nice. If you don't want to move, then I'll have to help you.

He was highly efficient in attacking the city and it would amaze people. It took him only one day to take the city. The Mongol cavalry was well-known for being fast and mobile, but facing the speed at which Li Wen Zhong advanced, they could only gape with their jaws

[69] The Chinese words Manzi literally mean barbarian, thus the author's comment.

dropped.

Because they didn't expect Li Wen Zhong would be so fast, the princes, dukes, and other nobles inside the city didn't have time to escape. All the wives of the Obedient Emperor of Yuan were captured. All the princes, dukes, and officials, including Libaci, the grandson of the Yuan emperor, were captured.

The only one escaped was Achishilidala, the son of the Yuan emperor, who later became the Illuminating Father of Yuan. He fled to Helin and met Wang Bao Bao. The miserable brothers sobbed and were determined to revenge.

Here many may ask, why was he called a celebrity general despite his terrible losses? This involves an important question, what kind of a man a celebrity general is.

How celebrity generals are made

Just as we have said before, we will analyze some of the very essence in history. Of course, I'm going to do it my way.

Many people envy the brilliances displayed by those famed generals and also wish to experience the feeling of commanding thousands of troops in combat. Thus those online military forums are filled with people. Many fans of military hate the fact that they are not born into an era of swords and arrows.

But the reality is there have been very few celebrity generals in history. Most of them are like the foot soldiers in those Three Kingdoms themed electronic games. They are killed not long after appearing in a battlefield. Thus a celebrity general is not easy to hammer out.

Here I'm going to show my opinion. This is also going to help us understand the growth process and experience of the Ming generals in later part of the book and Ming's military systems.

To achieve eminence, we need to go through six hurdles. Let's use six grades to mark them. One must finish the current grade to advance to the next grade. Of course there are some genius students who don't need to pass all six grades. There are ones who know how to fight from birth, but those are few and we can just ignore them.

OK, the school of celebrity generals starts. In the first grade one learns military theory. For all those who want to be famous, they must learn some classical theories, including *Sun Tzu's Military Theory*, *Wu Tzu's Military Theory*, etc. Only after accumulating a wealth of theoretical knowledge, can you advance to the next grade. But there is a very special requirement in this grade. Because some classmates' families are very poor and can't afford those books, they can only learn those theories in practice. Among them, the distinguished one is classmate Li Yun

Long.

It is well said that children born into poor families take responsibilities early. Those who learn theories in practice can skip the second grade and advance directly to the third grade.

Let's stay with the majority of the students and take a look at what a second grader learns. The curriculum for a second grader is actual combat. This is very important. Those who excel in theory and fail to pass this grade will be awarded a glorious title, Paper General. The first one who received such an award was classmate Zhao Kuo. The one that bestowed the award was the second grade headmaster, Zhao She[70].

Let's explain why combat experience is so important. Although military theories are the results of their own experiences of the students at higher grades, because when they wrote down their experiences the circumstances are different from current reality. If in combat someone just copies what they wrote down, he will suffer great losses. Classmate Zhao Kuo didn't do well and thus was not going to graduate.

As a student wishing to become an eminent general, usually they have to work their way up from a soldier. Of course the children of those high cadres are exceptions, for example, Classmate Zhao Kuo. Because the grade's headmaster was his father, from the start he became a general. This should not be appropriate.

Only battlefields can enable someone to become a general of real eminence. He must personally use a knife to chase his enemy, see the cruelty of combat, understand that men under knives are going to die, and understand the ultimate truth in battle is if you don't kill me I'll kill you. He knows that combat is really about gamble with your life. Then they will understand what is combat and what a real battle is.

Most of the students fail to pass this grade. They will change their careers and spend their lives as military enthusiasts, which is not a bad thing for them.

The ones remain will gradually understand the workings of wars through actual combats and embark on the way to achieve eminence.

OK, let's bring the remaining students to third grade. At third grade, the curriculum is to learn to be cruel.

To become a general of fame, one must say goodbye words like benevolence and lenience.

[70] Both Zhao She and Zhao Kuo were generals of the Kingdom of Zhao in late Warring States period in ancient China. Zhao She was the father of Zhao Kuo, who showed talent in military theory since very young. But Zhao She knew that he was only good at talking about fighting and would not be a good general. When the State of Qin invaded Zhao, the King of Zhao didn't heed the advice of Zhao She and named Zhao Kuo the commander-in-chief of the Zhao army. Zhao Kuo led his troops into a trap and the entire army was completely destroyed by the Qin army, resulting in one of the greatest military defeats in China's history.

His heart must be like an iron and stone and he must be cold-blooded and compassionless. Of course there are many learned generals well-known for their leniency, but please be aware that their leniency is toward their soldiers and civilians. To their enemies, they must be colder than anyone else.

Thus one doesn't command soldiers if he is lenient and one doesn't practice the trade if he is righteous. Being cold-blooded is not equivalent to being cruel or killing innocent civilians. Rather it's about being persistent. For example, if one of your best friends violated military laws, but you need to keep up the discipline, you must kill him, despite he is your best friend. Even if he is your relative you must do it.

This is real cold-blooded!

The students learn to be compassionless in battlefields. They may be all kind hearted young men. They never quarrel with anyone. But when they step onto a battlefield, seeing their own hometown buddies and friends being killed by enemies, or hearing the moaning of those who are severely wounded, they will be enraged and encouraged by sufferings and mercilessly kill all those who oppose them. They will add a slash to a wounded soldier on the ground and then murmur to themselves alone next to the dead body. In this hell-like environment, they change themselves.

From fear of killing a chicken to being unconscious about seeing the sputtering of enemy's brain matters and blood on their clothes, from being cultured and refined to being cold-blooded, they graduate from the brutal environment. Those who fail will be abandoned. But those whose hearts are like stones will advance to study in fourth grade. They will be closer to becoming celebrity generals.

The curriculum for fourth grade is restraint, which is also a very important step. As ordinary people, our emotions will be affected by many things happening in our lives. Such as when you buy a lottery and win a second prize and get a few hundred bucks, you will be happy for quite some time. No need to say more if you trade stocks and make a lot of money. If the bets in the game you are playing are human lives, how are you going to react?

When you have been in a stalemate under an extremely tense situation for a long time and the enemy suddenly retreated, will you be able to restrain your excitement and assess the situation before giving chase? When you are unable to resist enemy's attack and the troops are about to collapse, can you return to calmness and discover the enemy's weakness?

Yes, this is extremely difficult. We are all ordinary people. We all have feelings and easily get excited. But our students must remain calm and restraint and are not moved at any time by emotions. They are like race car drivers. Car racing is a sport filled with emotions and

excitements, but the drivers must remain absolutely calm.

These are all the things done by fourth grade students. Very few can pass this grade. To those elites who remain, let's move forward.

Fifth grade is the most important grade. In this grade, students need to learn decision making.

This is an important characteristic of a celebrity general. You need no reason, no evidence, and all you have is your own judgment. What you need to understand is, in your hands are the lives of numerous soldiers and everyone is waiting for your decision.

A private is only responsible for fighting. If he has questions, he asks his squad leader, who in turn asks his captain, who in turn asks his colonel, who in turn asks his commander, who is you. Whom are you going to ask?!

In the eyes of soldiers, you are the god, the one that rules the world! The survival of them depends on you!

The key in the delicateness of military strategies is a single word, change. Thus those who are good at coming up with extraordinary ideas are the ones whose ideas spread as vast as the sky and earth and as unlimited as the sea! A battlefield is a world in which everything changes ten thousand times in an instant. Decision is made in just a moment. To attack or defend, to advance or retreat, all are the decisions made by you. Next to you there are a whole bunch of aides and advisors but they are not on the side of the truth. The one making the decision is you. If your advisor is smarter than you, why are you the commander?!

If you are able to discover the secret from the constantly changing and unpredictable world and also make the correct decision, then congratulations, you have acquired the most important quality as a general of eminence. But there must be one more test you must pass. Only when you pass this test, can you be a real general of eminence.

Now let's come to the last grade. In this grade, we're going to learn to persevere.

To a certain extent, this is a very important curriculum. The saying that win and loss are the norm in combat is no more than just a way to soothe someone. You were defeated, tens of thousands died, then are you able to bear the psychological impact to yourself? How are you going to face the families of those soldiers? Do you still have the courage to face your superior who gave you the power to command? Those are tens of thousands of human lives, not chickens!

But the only choice you have is to persevere. Even if you fight and lose every time, you must fight again! We can imagine that after you have been defeated by the same man you will dread this man. The so-called man-phobia stems from this. Even if you have extraordinary

military capability, if you cannot overcome your own weakness, you still cannot become a general of eminence.

The best men are able to rise up again from defeat and challenge the ones who have beaten them many times. This is perseverance!

Once you have acquired all of the above capabilities, you have become a real general of eminence. But there is one more thing that you must have, luck.

It sounds funny and this is also an important factor. Perhaps just when you are all prepared to show your skills, a stray arrow shoots you to death. That will be more pitiable than Doue[71]. All of your ambitions and capabilities cannot be exhibited any more. In military history books there can only be such kind of an entry, that on such day of such a month of such a year, such man was shot to death by an unknown soldier, whose identity and other details are unknown.

Thus the road to becoming eminence is a treacherous road. One without extraordinary wisdom and courage and luck will not be able to make it.

> *Thus there is no constancy in military affairs and there is no fixed shape in water. Those who are able to achieve victory in response to enemy's changes are gods.*[72]

In this constantly changing battlefield, if you want to be a true god in military affairs, you must be able to survive from every brutal fight, see the people around you die, endure endless sufferings, learn war in wars, strive to acquire the secrets and laws unknown to others, experience endless defeats, be courageous enough to rise up from the bodies of soldiers, and defeat your enemy.

This is the real road to achieve eminency. It is a road of suffering, loneliness, and blood. On this road, the only one you can rely on and trust is yourself. But if you walk to the end, Glory and Victory are there waiting for you.

Xu Da, Chang Yu Chun, Wang Bao Bao and later Qi Ji Guang and Yuan Chong Huan are all celebrity generals of this kind. The all grew up this way. They all had reasons to be proud of themselves for having their own experiences in their growths.

Thus to all those students who fail to become celebrity generals, you don't need be sad and disappointed. Because this is not a job an ordinary person can do. It can even be said that it's not a job a human can do. All ordinary students, go back and return as civilians, that's a happy life.

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[71] Doue is a character in an ancient Chinese folk story, which tells the miseries and injustices a woman named Doue suffered. Doue was sentenced to die and before the execution she swore to heaven that she was innocent and heaven would respond by snowing in June and other unusual weather phenomenon, which all actually happened after she was executed. Later the story was rewritten as a play in Yuan Dynasty.

[72] This is a quote from *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu.

Ming's successive victories in the war against the Northern Yuan finally made Yuan realize that the enemy it faced was not the once easy to subdue Southern Song government. Rather it was a strong opponent that could completely destroy them.

Wang Bao Bao understood what he needed to do was wait. There could always been another chance.

Two years later, the Yuan army that had been cowering finally slowly started to extend its antennae to Ming. They assaulted from all directions. Taking advantage of the withdrawal of Ming troops, they reoccupied the large regions from Jilin in the east to Gansu and northern Ningxia in the west. They used these strongholds as bases and launched continuous attacks against Ming troops. They still employed the annoying guerrilla tactics. If you strike, they run away and if you leave, they come back.

Under this circumstance, Zhu Yuan Zhang and his generals began to discuss the ways to deal with Northern Yuan. There were disagreements on the method. The majority of them, including Xu Da, wanted to attack and get Northern Yuan fixed once for all. But there were also ones who opposed.

Two opposed it. One was Liu Ji and the other one was Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Liu Ji thought Northern Yuan still possessed great strength. More importantly, Wang Bao Bao was still alive. As to Zhu Yuan Zhang, he relied more on his gifted military intuition. If this was ten years ago, he would stick to his opinion and emphasize on defense. But now it was different.

Now he was the ruler of a great country. He could not show his weakness to the world. Thus he agreed with Xu Da and others and made plans for offense.

From this we can see that Liu Bo Wen was indeed a man of great renown. His is a perfect illustration of the law that truth are usually in the hands of the few. Zhu Yuan Zhang also proved it was not luck that allowed him to rule the world.

After all, the boss has to be right!

Chapter Fifteen

Expedition into the Desert

Zhu Yuan Zhang this time made nearly a perfect a plan. All the generals under him were in this. He mustered an army of a hundred fifty thousand. Xu Da was named the senior general for campaigning against barbarians. Li Wen Zhong was named the left deputy general and Feng Sheng the right deputy general. Each led fifty thousand and marched out as three armies.

Xu Da was in the middle, out from Goose Gate Pass to attack Helin. On the way it was declared they would push Wang Bao Bao and the Northern Yuan emperor to their home. But this was a deception. His real intention was to lure the Yuan army to come out to fight. Then they would destroy the enemy in open country. The plan illustrated two points. One, the strength of the Ming army was comparatively strong enough to fight decisively in open country. Two, the military thoughts of Zhu Yuan Zhang achieved new heights, with the main goal to destroy the enemy force, which was rarely recognized.

In addition, Li Wen Zhong was on the right, out from Juyongguan to approach Helin, via Yingchang. He would launch an unexpected attack when Xu Da was fighting with the Yuan forces and cut off Yuan's retreat and then join Xu Da to attack Yuan forces.

Feng Sheng was on the west, out from Gansu. He didn't have a fixed strategic goal. His forces were for confusing the enemy. Basically this unit was out for a tour and grabbing some spoils along the way.

This strategic plan of Zhu Yuan Zhang's included the main offense, the secondary offense, and a feint offense. Offenses were launched separately and once the opportunity developed, the three forces would combine to attack. This could be considered as a perfect plan.

But just like what we've said before, changes in the battlefields can happen so fast that no one, not can even the outstanding military leaders like Zhu Yuan Zhang and Xu Da, could fully grasp.

The time for the expedition came. Among the three generals, Feng Sheng was the one most depressed. He considered himself not any less capable but he was only assigned an auxiliary

role. But Xu Da and Li Wen Zhong were pompous and haughty. As the main actors of the war, they resolved to sweep up Northern Yuan in this battle.

Feng Sheng, you don't need to be depressed, because in war, the main role and the auxiliary role often change.

On May 22 of year five of Martial Splendor, the three armies set out to attack Northern Yuan from different routes. Different fates were awaiting them.

Before the start of the expedition, Zhu Yuan Zhang let the commanders-in-chief themselves choose their vanguard. Unexpected by many, Xu Da chose a relatively inexperienced general. Because this man was Chang Yu Chun's brother in law and Chang Yu Chun was Xu Da's old companion, many people thought this time Xu Da opened the back door and intentionally let this man receive some credits, so as to commiserate the regret that Chang Yu Chun weren't on the expedition. Because this expedition was thought to demonstrate to Northern Yuan and it was a must-win battle, everyone wanted to take credit and many were disgruntled over Xu Da's nepotism.

They rather underestimated Xu Da, who was truly the foremost general of eminence in Ming Dynasty. He worked miracles in maneuvering troops. He was fair and just. He chose this man on the expedition because he was indeed the best man for the job.

This man was Lan Yu!

The depressed Feng Sheng also picked his vanguard, Fu You De, who was a legendary figure. Before this he seemed having never suffered a defeat. But because he didn't have many opportunities to show himself, his reputation was far below those of Guo Xing and others. Feng Sheng picked him as vanguard and seemed to have written himself off on the job.

The choice of these two men in large extent saved this unsuccessful expedition, which could only be described as doing something without purpose but still got the results.

On February 29 of year five of Martial Splendor (AD 1372), Xu Da and his troops entered Shanxi. Lan Yu led the cavalry as the vanguard and went out from Goose Gate Pass first. He was lucky, he ran into Wang Bao Bao's cavalry in Bronco Creek[73]. Lan Yu boldly attacked at the front of his troops and defeated Wang Bao Bao. This was Wang Bao Bao's first retreat.

On March 20, Lan Yu chased through the night and attacked Wang Bao Bao again at Tuci River[74]. Wang Bao Bao was defeated and fled north, which was Wang Bao Bao's second retreat.

Both Xu Da and Lan Yu got very excited. To them, it seemed that tomorrow they would be able to destroy Wang Bao Bao.

[73] Present day Herlen River in Mongolia
[74] In present day west of Ulaanbaatar

But now Wang Bao Bao finally got the opportunity he had been waiting for so that he could exact revenge. As early as one month ago, he got the news of Ming's expedition. After carefully evaluating his own troop strength, he correctly recognized that, his own ability was not a match against Xu Da's and his troops fighting ability was also not a match against Ming cavalry. Thus he decided not to confront the Ming army directly. If he did, he would lose. To defeat the Ming army, he had to do an ambush.

To achieve this goal, he discussed with He Zong Zhe, one of the Yuan generals. Both agreed to set up a trap at Ridge North[75]. Thus at the beginning of the battle, he sent troops to contact Ming troops and feigned defeats. It should be pointed out that Lan Yu was a cool-headed general. He didn't go too far off. Rather he waited for Xu Da's main army to come. But having been carried away by victories, Xu Da took the bait.

On May 6, Wang Bao Bao suddenly appeared in Ridge North. Xu Da immediately commanded the troops to chase. After he entered the mountainous area in Ridge North, He Zong Zhe suddenly appeared and raided Ming troops by stealth. Unprepared, the Ming army suffered a great loss with more than ten thousand casualties. Then Wang Bao Bao and He Zong Zhe combined and set to completely destroy Xu Da's army.

But Xu Da after all was Xu Da. What he learned at fourth grade saved him. Under extremely unfavorable circumstance, relying on his unimaginable wisdom and restraint he stabilized the situation and withdrew safely. He also built forts, which repulsed a dozen attacks by Wang Bao Bao. In these battles Lan Yu was very courageous. Many times he covered the retreat of the army, which showed his quality as a distinguished general.

When Wang Bao Bao saw a duck in a pot flew away, he could only sigh, I can't beat Xu Da in this life!

Just at the same time when the middle army suffered a defeat, Li Wen Zhong's action also perfectly validated the accuracy of the adage that troubles come in pairs. On June 29, Li Wen Zhong led his troops to Kouwen[76]. The Yuan army lost and retreated. Li Wen Zhong seemed to have been affected by Xu Da, he also began to underestimate the enemy and advanced carelessly forward. He left the baggage train behind and led the main force to chase the Yuan army.

Li Wen Zhong wasn't without strategic thinking. His way of maneuvering troops was about speed. If Xu Da could be thought as a long distance runner who had all the strategies well thought out, Li Wen Zhong would be a capable one hundred meter racer. In Yingchang, he set a record by taking a city in just one day. This time, he determined that the Yuan army

[75] In present day northern Inner Mongolia
[76] Now south of Chagannouer in Inner Mongolia

wasn't prepared, thus he gave chase without much concern, in an attempt to completely destroy the Yuan army.

When his chase led him to the Arghun River[77], he finally found the retreating Yuan army. But it seemed to be different from his imagination, that the army was not showing the wretchedness and weariness of a fleeing army. Instead, every soldier was in high spirit like ferocious tigers and was ready for action.

He seemed to have been taken.

The commanding general of the Yuan army was Manzi Hacichan, who was a very capable general. He adopted the same strategy as Wang Bao Bao's. He attracted the main force of the Ming army and then sought the opportunity to fight decisively. At the moment when Li Wen Zhong's troops already were in the chase for many days and very tired. But the Yuan army used small forces to do the enticement and the main force was well rested. They had been waiting for Li Wen Zhong for a long time.

In a situation like this, there wasn't much else to think about other than to fight.

Li Wen Zhong was indeed very tough, under the extremely adverse circumstance, he personally led the troops to fight the Yuan troops. The ferocious battle lasted for several days. He managed to defeat the Yuan army and inflicted nearly ten thousand casualties. But the Ming army also suffered heavy losses. Needless to say that with such kind of a result, he got his face saved, he should just return. But Li Wen Zhong was not a man easy to deal with once provoked.

He refused all other ideas, relying on his amazing toughness and leadership, led his troops and chased the Yuan army to Cheng Sea[78]. He was determined to completely eliminate the Yuan troops. Yuan general Manzi Hacichan knew he was in a big trouble by provoking a fiend like this one. He already ordered a retreat to avoid Li Wen Zhong. Will you let me go? I don't want to fight.

He didn't expect Li Wen Zhong would have pushed him so far and being so ruthless on him in pursuing him all the way and not even caring about his own dear life. The saying says even a dog under duress is going to jump over the wall, moreover I'm a man! The Yuan army then deployed for a decisive battle and was ready to fight to death. Although Li Wen Zhong was bold and brave, he was not foolish. Upon seeing the Yuan army was to fight to death, he withdrew the troops and built forts to confront the Yuan army, which was very surprised and didn't understand why the guy who had chased them for hundreds of lis would suddenly stop

[77] In present day west of Ulaanbaatar
[78] Present day Lake Halahust in Mongolia

fighting. But they also didn't dare to move. Thus both sides settled into a stalemate. Not long after, Li Wen Zhong found out he was short on provisions. He contemptuously and ostentatiously did the withdrawal of troops like doing a parade. The Yuan army saw he was so arrogant and determined that there must be an ambush set up, thus they didn't dare to chase. Li Wen Zhong thus was able to safely return.

To a certain extent both Xu Da and Li Wen Zhong achieved their goals of striking the Yuan armies. But those could at most be counted as draws and shouldn't be thought as victories.

Instead it was the previously overlooked west army that made miracles and the maker of the miracles was Fu You De.

The destination of the advance for the west army was Lanzhou. After arriving at Lanzhou, Feng Sheng made a decision to divide the forces!

Because his assignment in this expedition was just to feign an attack and was not much a combat mission, fifty thousand men would be idle anyway. It would be better for them to have something to do. But after all Feng Sheng was a first rate general, he knew fully well that deep inside a desert, dividing forces was a grave concern. Thus he only allotted five thousand men to Fu You De. Even stranger, he didn't assign explicit tasks to Fu You De. Feng Sheng shouldn't be blamed for this because even himself didn't have explicit assignment.

To me, it seemed that Feng Sheng saw he had fifty thousand idle men and just wanted to let some out for a tour.

Five thousand men were not that many. But it would depend on who had them. When the troops were in the hands of Fu You De, the tour would bring about something.

The miraculous Fu You De

He didn't cower behind just because he had fewer troops. After assessing the current situation, he led his five thousand cavalrymen to attack Xiliang[79] and defeated Yuan general Shisihan. This was victory number one.

After the victory, Fu You De didn't pause, attacked Yongchang[80], defeated Yuan defense minister Doerchiba, and killed thousands of enemy soldiers. This was victory number two.

Now Feng Sheng finally recognized Fu You De's capabilities. Without much concern, he boldly put the main force under Fu You De's command. For Fu You De, this was like adding wings to a tiger. He led the troops to re-attack the Yuan forces in Mt Wood Sweep[81], captured a

[79] Present day Wuwei of Gansu
[80] Now part of Gansu
[81] Present day north of Jiuchuan in Gansu

Yuan governor alive, and killed more than five hundred Yuan troops. This was victory number three.

Now the Yuan troops in Gansu panicked. They heard from various sources that there was a madman named Fu You De, who would attack whenever and wherever he saw Yuan troops, and he would win in every battle. They were very afraid of him and could only pray to heaven that the madman wouldn't bring trouble to them.

But Fu You De was like a clock fully wound up that couldn't stop. On June 3, he continued his attack. This time the unfortunate Yuan general was Shandoluer. By mistake he ran into Fu You De. The result was his whole forces were annihilated and he was also captured. This was victory number four.

On June 11, Fu You De's troops attacked Jinailu[82], when hearing that Fu You De came, the defending Yuan commander Boyan Temur didn't even have the will to resist and immediately opened the gate to surrender. This was victory number five.

Fu You De led his army and continued the advance. At the gap of Mt Biedo he met the main forces of Doerchiban, Prince Qi of Yuan. Fu You De didn't utter a word and immediately attacked. He defeated nearly ten thousand Yuan troops and captured more than twenty military and civilian officials. Doerchiban, Prince Qi of Yuan, escaped alone by himself. This was victory number six.

Thereafter, he led the troops and chased to Guazhou[83] and defeated the local Yuan force. He also captured large numbers of goats, cattle, and other booties. This was victory number seven.

The fighting continued until to October. Because there were large quantities of captured booties, which greatly impacted the speed of advance, and also the Yuan troops were now timorous and would flee whenever they saw the west army, there weren't opportunities to fight anymore. On the 24, the Ming army returned.

In the five months from May to October, Yuan forces were in unbearable misery. Fu You De led tens of thousands troops and battled from Gansu to Mongolia. He was invincible and harassed the Yuan forces again and again. The Yuan troops both hated him and feared him. They couldn't win if they fought and they couldn't avoid him either. They had to live in fear.

Fu You De commanded a force of several thousand and entered the Northern Yuan territory like in no man's land. He crisscrossed north and south and there wasn't a man to stop him, which was something that should really be admired by later generations. His long lasting

[82] Present day Ejina in Inner Mongolia
[83] Present da Anxi of Gansu

legendary record of seven victories in seven battles thus belonged to history books.

In November, the middle army Xu Da and right army Li Wen Zhong, facing unfavorable situation, also came back in turn. In this northern expedition, Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't achieve his goal of completely destroying the Northern Yuan. On the other hand Northern Yuan also recognized the might of Ming. Both sides thus entered a state of stalemate. The first generation of the Ming generals thus also ended their stories and would face their future destinies.

The stalemate wasn't broken until more than ten years later. The man who broke it was Lan Yu, the one that grew up in this northern expedition.

Chapter Sixteen

The Founding of a Nation

Put aside the war against Northern Yuan. Let's take a look at how Zhu Yuan Zhang built his nation.

After Zhu Yuan Zhang created his nation, his first task was to give it a name. This was rather extremely important, just like today people need to name their children. This name would be sounded for hundreds of years and it couldn't be done without care.

To many people, the Mongols were a people on horsebacks with limited cultivation in tradition and culture. But the dynasty they created was named Yuan, which had its resourceful origin. The character Yuan was the word Genesis in *I Ching*'s "Alas, Grand, Heaven and Genesis". This demonstrated Yuan's admiration of the Chinese culture and tradition.

But there have been many theories about why Zhu Yuan Zhang named his empire Ming. Many people thought this was because Zhu Yuan Zhang was from the Ming Cult and therefore the name. But others thought because Yuan was a northern power and according to Fengshui, it was water and its property was Yin, and because Zhu Yuan Zhang had its capital in the south and so wanted to use the glow of fire to suppress the Yin of the northern water.

Of course, to get to the bottom of this, you'd have to ask Zhu Yuan Zhang.

After choosing a name for his own nation, he also thought about finding a glorious ancestor for himself. Although he often addressed himself as an "ordinary man from the right of Huai" and seemed to show himself as some hero who wouldn't mind of his humble origin, officials all knew these titles could only be proclaimed by himself. If someone dared to say out loud in front of him, he only needed to wait to lose his head. He initially considered taking the great saintly man Zhu Xi as his ancestor, but a practical reason made him to give up on this idea.

That was because the era when Zhu Xi lived was too close to his time. It was too hard to confuse people and to make them believe. Zhu Hundred Six was still there in the shrine. Not to mention to try to fool others, he wouldn't even be able to fool himself. Thus he abandoned

the effort.

After more than twenty years of wars and unrests, the vast land of China was full of starving and hungry people. Fields were uncultivated. The most important job for the first emperor of a new nation was to restore production, on which Zhu Yuan Zhang did a very good job. He paid great attention to issues on agriculture, land, and peasants. His enthusiasm was all on the brother peasants. In year three of Martial Splendor (AD 1370), he decreed he would waive the taxes for three years on anyone who farmed uncultivated land. In addition, to encourage cultivation, he created laws that said, if you cultivate wasteland, then the land will belong to you, even if the original owner comes to ask for it, you don't have to worry, I Zhu Yuan Zhang, will be behind you. This greatly stipulated the cultivation of wasteland.

To encourage farming, he also issued orders that all convicts, except those who were sentenced to die, would be sent to farming, which could be counted as a good deed. It's worth noting that among the convicts, officials were the majority. At the time just in Fengyang region, there were more than ten thousand officials planting rice in fields, for which we'll explain the reason later. At the same time, he also reduced the taxes in many regions, except one.

This region was the Zhejiang and Jiangsu areas once occupied by Zhang Shi Cheng. Because the people in the region supported Zhang Shi Cheng, he was very unhappy about it. He decreed the taxes of this region would be several times of the other areas. The decree was not abolished until later. From this we can see Zhu Yuan Zhang was a vindictive man. Please remember this personality of his, which will be very beneficial for us to analyze his later behaviors.

Comparatively, he hated those who were in trade and commerce, which could be rooted from his bad childhood experience with rice profiteers. Shen Wan San, a well-known rich businessman of the time, became the victim of his policy, which encouraged agriculture but stifled trade. This Shen Wan San was very wealthy. It was said he had a treasure gathering pot in his home, thus he had unlimited amount of money. This comrade also wanted to learn from Lu Bu Wei[84] and wanted to profit from the political turmoil. On his own initiative he went to serve under Zhu Yuan Zhang and donated his money to build one third of the walls of the city of Nanjing. The walls were very strong and were built with high quality granite with gluten rice pulp and the outer walls were also covered with lime. They could be called iron walls.

Shen Wan San spent a lot of money and hoped to get some back from Zhu Yuan Zhang.

[84] Lu Bu Wei was a well-known politician of Warring States Era in ancient China. He was allegedly the biological father of the Qin Shi Huang Di, the first emperor of China. He had a concubine, whom he later presented to the King of the State of Qin, who was the father of Qin Shi Huang Di. The concubine gave birth to Qin Shi Huang Di soon after she was given to the king, thus it was alleged that she was already pregnant with Lu Bu Wei's child.

But he never understood what kind of a man Zhu Yuan Zhang was. After Zhu Yuan Zhang learned about this, he remained reticent. Then after the walls were finished, he was ready to kill him. Shen Wan San was too foolish, how could someone like Zhu Yuan Zhang tolerate a business man to build the walls of the capital city! Thanks to the relentless persuasion of Empress Ma, Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't do it. But he still confiscated Shen Wan San's property and banished him to Yunnan.

Shen Wan San took a loss for the first time in his life on a business deal. But he wasn't the only unlucky one. Almost all tradesmen were discriminated against. It seemed that Zhu Yuan Zhang's actions against merchants were nothing out of ordinary, but to a great extent it changed the direction of development that was favorable to trade since the Song Dynasty, which had a profound impact to the development of China. We will further examine this later in more detail.

On government, he almost entirely copied the Yuan Dynasty. The central government consisted of a secretariat and left and right prime ministers responsible for important state affairs. There were the Six Ministries. Many people thought Zhu Yuan Zhang would continue to follow Yuan's system. But what happened later was not something they expected, which will also be explained later.

Ming had many systems. We introduce the above so that we can have a basis for the stories below.

The highest honor for an educated man

Here we need to have an introduction on the imperial civil service examination system in Ming. This is one of those things unique to Ming.

The imperial examination system was not originated in Ming, but it was greatly expanded and more widely adopted in Ming. It is interesting that although the system existed in Tang and Song, there were very few positions. Usually there were only dozens admitted in one season. In Ming, imperial examinations started in year three of Martial Splendor (AD 1370) and it expanded admissions. Because of this expansion, the number of those who wanted to be in civil service also expanded and more and more took up study as a career. These men later became Ming's civilian power base.

The exams were conducted at three levels. The first level was the college exam. The participants were called juvenile students. Don't assume the test takers were all children. There were seventy or eighty year old juvenile students. The tests were held in prefectures and counties. The ones that passed this test were what we know as outstanding talents. Don't

assume it was easy to become an outstanding talent. The results consisted of six grades and only those who received the highest grades were entitled to be called outstanding talents. The ones who received the top and second grades were eligible for the next level of exam, which was called Admissible Subject.

Having earned the title of outstanding talent, from now on you are not a commoner anymore. By any means you are now an intellectual. You have some privileges. For example, you do not have to perform statuary labor and you don't have to kneel down before a county magistrate. But you are not an official and rather, you are still far from it.

It's already so difficult to become an outstanding talent. But to get an official position, comrade, you must continue to toil!

The next level of exam was called county exam. Don't be confused, the so-called county exam was not an exam done at the county level, but it was rather a provincial level exam. Please note also county exam was not something that could be taken any time. It was done once every three years and it was usually done in August. The subjects were named by the provincial government and there were also quotas. The ones that passed the tests at this level were titled recommended man, which was significant because the titled man was eligible for office. So far it was just eligibility because at this level, an official position was not guaranteed, just like today's college graduates, who are not guaranteed jobs.

Then how a recommended man would take office? Very simple, when someone in office died, you'd get your chance.

Thus if you were in Ming and went to a funeral ceremony of an official, and you saw there were people with joy on their faces poking their heads inside the door, then they either held a grudge against the family, or they were recommended men.

Now everyone should know why Comrade Fan Jin went mad after passing the test and was awarded the title of recommended man. If it happened to you, you'd gone mad as well[85].

The one who placed first in this exam was called top appointee, which was the first top of the three tops.

OK, now you've earned the title of recommended man and finally out of the provincial capital. Now go to the nation's capital. For an office, charge forward!

Now you are a recommended man, please pack up and get ready with your brush, ink, paper, and ink stone. In February next year you will meet the true test of your life, the general exam.

[85] Fan Jin is a fictional character in a novel by a well-known Chinese short story writer. In the story, Fan Jin tried and failed many times before he passed the test, and then immediately went mad after hearing the news that he passed the test.

Only those who possessed the title of recommended man were eligible to be in the general exam. In other words, your competitors were the elites from other provinces. The imperial court would pick three hundred (subject to change) among those of you. But take note, these three hundred men were not the ones we usually call distinguished scholars. They were just senior licentiates. To become a distinguished scholar, you must overcome one more hurdle.

The first place finisher in the general exam was called top general appointee, which was the second top in the three tops.

Before we explain the next hurdle, we need to describe the exam room of an imperial exam. The room of that time was not like today's well-lit classroom, with a whole bunch of parents holding watermelons in their hands waiting outside. The examination hall in Ming was called licentiate's hall. Actually based on its construction and environment, it was more like a jail.

There were close to ten thousand rooms in a licentiate's hall (someone may want to estimate the rate of admission). All of them were single rooms. One may think single rooms are good, don't rush your judgment, let me describe the room. The room was called cosigned chamber, which was five chis[86] long, four chis wide, and eight chis high.

You can see this is almost like a cage. Before entering the room, the student was searched. Only writing instruments and candles were allowed. Everyone was given three candle sticks. Once the student went in, the door was immediately closed and locked. The student stayed inside to answer the questions. The student stayed inside through the night. But because the room was too small, students could only sleep by curling up. It was just unimaginably uncomfortable.

Yet under these harsh conditions and the forlorn candle lights, enduring unendurable loneliness and boredom, striving to serve their country, our ancestors, with stamina and fortitude, they wrote down splendid essays that were filled with brilliance. They truly deserved our respects and admiration.

Everyone who went through the exam should deserve our applause, not just those who passed, but also those who failed.

The last test that the elites who passed the general exam would face was the palace exam, in which they would face the ruler of the empire. The format of the exam was that the emperor asked questions and the students would answer. The subjects were mostly on policies. The poor students wouldn't dare and were not allowed to raise their heads. They could only timorously and tremulously answer the questions, exit, and then wait for their fate.

Based on the students' performance, the emperor and the senior officials grouped the

[86] Chi is a Chinese length unit. A chi is about one foot.

students into tiers. There were only three students in the top tier. This tier was called distinguished scholar finalists, who were the top scholar overall, eye of the list, and scout of flower, which are the names that everyone now is already familiar with. There were various numbers of students in tier two, which was called conferred distinguished scholar graduates. There were also various numbers of students in tier three, which was called conferred distinguished scholar graduates equivalent.

The top scholar overall was the third top of the three tops.

If by now you are on the list, then congratulations, you will be appointed an official position. But don't expect too much, for the moment the positions are all not at high levels. After so much toil, you most likely will only be appointed an eighth grade county deputy, far from a county magistrate. But regardless, after all, you are an official.

The imperial exam was not only a way to acquire office, but also the path for intellectuals to pursue honor and respect. To them, top scholar overall was their target. Although everyone said there was no such thing as the top essay, but being first was something everyone strived for. If the top scholar overall is a human, then why not me?!

The reality was indeed like this. Although it was very difficult to become a top scholar overall and there was only one every three years, so the yield was very low, there surely were some. Thus the topmost honor for intellectuals was not the top scholar overall, but rather another title, which was the dream of every scholar. The one that earned such a title would become a legend, admired by millions!

This title was top all three, which was given to a man with all three titles, top appointee, top general appointee, and top scholar overall. This was truly an act of high degree of difficulty, which required being first in provincial exam, then first in nationwide exam, and finally first in the opinion of the emperor. To be possible to earn such a title, it required the student to be good not only on academics, but also quick in reaction, and looked handsome. Thus there must be some luck in earning such a title. It wouldn't be enough that someone's family ancestral tomb just had white smoke billowing; it needed to have fire spewing[87].

This kind of man appeared only once in the two hundred seventy six years of Ming. This man was Shang Lu of the years of Justly Principled. He was truly amazing. He left his mark in history and later we'll see him again.

Since the beginning of the imperial exam system in Sui and Tang, only thirteen people were able to obtain such an honor. There were two in Tang, six in Song, one in Jin[88], one in

[87] Saying smoke is rising at someone's ancestral tomb is a Chinese way to say someone is extremely lucky.
[88] This Jin is not the same Jin mentioned in the previous chapters.

Yuan, two in Ming, and two in Qing. These people truly deserved our reverence.

There should be a special explanation here as many books recorded only one top all three in Ming. This is incorrect. In the years of Martial Splendor, Huang Guan of Anhui earned top all three. During the civil war, Emperor Perpetual Happiness loathed Huang Guan and removed his name from the list of the admitted. The first place was changed to Han Ke Zhong. Thus in most history records, the name Huang Guan is not among the top all threes. Now we especially restore his honor here for this loyal official and gifted intellectual.

The process of becoming an official

The purpose of taking imperial exam was to get a position. As more and more ordinary people became civil servants, the traditional power of the nobles slowly diminished. The so-called imperial exam faction took shape among the distinguished scholars. This was the later scholar bureaucrats, who greatly influenced the politics of Ming. They formed mafia-like organizations, which threatened the emperor above and ruled the masses below and they were very intimidating. Here, let's take a look at the inner workings of these organizations.

As we have said before, an admitted distinguished scholar was eligible for office. But it was very difficult for a recommended man to obtain a position. They would need to take three general exams. If someone was really inept, and still couldn't pass, he could register himself at the Ministry of Personnel. After several (from one to dozens of years) years, if more officials died and vacancies became available, some of these registered recommended men would be selected to take offices. This was called big selection. Then what were the criteria for the big selection? Although it sounds unbelievable, it was just one's appearance. The selection method was like identifying a crime suspect among a row of people in a policy headquarters. The recommended men were just like suspects and dozens of them would line up and be selected by the senior officials of the Ministry of Personnel.

Now, the ugly ones could only cry to the heaven and wouldn't be able to get a reply. If you were certain that you wouldn't be able to get your share, you'd better just go home early.

But, alas, being ugly shouldn't be your fault.

The selected recommended men would be given potions. Although these men failed to advance to the rank of distinguished scholar, nonetheless they appeared on the list of those admitted. Thus they were dubbed as first round graduates. Distinguished scholars were dubbed as second round graduates. After all, everyone survived the exams, thus the distinguished scholars considered a recommended man one of their own. They were the so-called pure grades.

The internal classification system of the pure grades is very interesting and should be explained in detail. Once the rules are well understood, it will be easier to understand the many historical events occurred in the scholar bureaucracies of the middle years of Ming.

We use five officials as an example to illustrate this. The names of the officials are A, B, C, D, and E. The positions of the five are: A is deputy minister of war (third grade), B is the associate minister of rites (fifth grade), C is the assistant to associate minister of justice (secondary fifth grade), D is editorial writer academician at the Imperial Academy (secondary fifth grade), and E is an advisor to the governor (secondary fourth grade)[89].

Among the five, A, B, C, and D are distinguished scholars, and E is a recommended man. When they meet each other in the hall of the Ministry of War, after ascertaining their official positions, they sit down in certain order. The conversation begins, because they are not talking about official matters, naturally they start with their academic origins. At this moment, E will certainly withdraw first, why?

Because he is savvy enough! Although his official position ranks second among the five, they are talking about matters with regard to distinguished scholars. You are just a recommended man, who didn't even take part in the palace exam, what's your business here? This is like present day asking each other about academic degrees, he graduated from Beijing University and I graduated from Tsinghua University, what about you? You wouldn't say that you graduated from Clayton University[90]. To participate in the conversation in this situation is no different from embarrassing yourself. Plus, these men of distinguished scholars very much like talking about the things happened at the time when they were awarded the degrees. When someone opens his mouth, the first words coming out are usually like "when I was answering questions during the palace exam, I did really well on blah, blah, etc.", which is just like that famous phrase in *Fortress Besieged*, "when yours truly was in the Great Britain". Once a while, a phrase like this is tossed out. In fact he was really answering a question with the wrong answers and crawled out without knowing which way was the exit. But who knows, this is the first phase, when meeting someone, show off your origin.

Next is the second phase. Now everyone is a distinguished scholar, then conversations become easier. The next topic is about when the degree was awarded. After some chat, A got it in year sixteen of Martial Splendor, B got his in year nineteen, D got his in year twenty two, and C's prestige is the highest, he got his in year three of Martial Splendor. This is very much like now we ask someone: "which year did you graduate? Oh, you are my senior, please

[89] The grades mentioned here are not ranks of officials. The smaller the grade number, the higher the rank.
[90] Clayton University is a fictional college in a well-known Chinese novel *Fortress Besieged*, from where one of the protagonists graduated. Because it sounded foreign, he was able to fool many into thinking it was a well-established college when in fact it didn't exist.

pardon me." In that era it wouldn't do by just offering a few words. At that time, the other three would have to salute to C, which was the rule. Even if your official rank is higher or you are older than him, you still have to salute to someone who was awarded the degree earlier than you. This is phase two, show off your qualifications.

The third phase is to compare rank. Even for distinguished scholars, there are ranks among them. A says: "I was in third tier distinguished scholar graduate equivalent." B smiled: "I was in second tier distinguished scholar graduate." C also smiled: "I was the fifteenth in the second tier."

Now D says: "I am a plebeian meritorious."

The others must immediately stop smiling and obediently stand up and salute. This is because a plebeian meritorious carries significant clout.

Among all the distinguished scholars, only the three men in the first tier were eligible to be admitted to the Imperial Academy directly. A few from the second and third tier would be awarded as plebeian meritorious after an elite selection exam. They were responsible for interpreting the classics to the emperor and drafting imperial decrees. They were the secretaries of the emperor with enormous power. In mid Ming, it further became the custom that someone could not be a grand academician without being a plebeian meritorious first.

Isn't a plebeian meritorious dreadful?

After the three rounds of exchanges, everyone knows where he stands and they know they will rely on each other. In this way, the imperial exam faction set the order and became a powerful force.

The attraction of being awarded a degree of distinguished scholar was great to contemporaries, and a good rank added extra attraction. Chinese people paid special attention on returning their homes in fine silky clothes. One dressed in official attire to return to home to show his new status to his old country fellows and neighboring brothers, uncles, and aunts. This was an occasion when there was more grandeur there would be more glory to his family.

We can see in television shows that when ancient officials go out, there are always a large group of people ahead of him. The ones in the front beat the gongs and raise the signs to clear the way. I don't know if anyone pays attention to those who held the signs. All the mysteries are in those signs!

If you are the top scholar overall, then you are awe-inspiring. The sign can have big words like "top scholar overall awarded", "granted imperial academician". You ostentatiously walk on the streets and make numerous people sigh with admiration. They grab and shake their children's heads to ensure that they will learn from you!

What words to put on the sign of a second or third tier one? His sign would explicitly show words like "distinguished scholar graduate equivalent" or "second level exam graduate", which would also attract the envy of many.

It's easy to post the sign of a distinguished scholar. After all, he has seen the world. Then what about the sign for a recommended man? You can't write distinguished scholar awarded or second level exam graduate. Don't worry, people always have ideas. Because he is not allowed to write much on his sign, when a recommended man goes out, he needs to fully utilize his power of imagination.

For example, if he was awarded the degree of recommended man in year Dingyin[91] in the county exam in Jiangxi province, he writes on his sign "recommended man of Dingyin". Think more about it, yours truly is the chief clerk (Regular ninth grade) in the county government. Although it's a low level position, it's still a government post. Thus on the second sign you write "chief clerk of county X". In addition, there are signs that show awards of some year and some month. Even achievements in work can be written on it. After all, it will just be enough to ensure that ordinary people can be fooled.

It was this very attraction that made countless number of people one after another to march toward government offices. But just as we've said before, how difficult would it be for someone to obtain a government position? Zhu Yuan Zhang and his descendants had already set up a most difficult obstacle for them. This obstacle not only changed the ancient imperial exam system, it also put innumerable number of people in extreme misery. To some extent, it also impacted the fate of China for the next a few hundred years.

This obstacle was the octet-essay.

Octet-essay

This is a phenomenon worth mentioning. Octet-essay should be considered an invention of the Ming Dynasty. This set of paraphernalia was originated by Zhu Yuan Zhang and perfected in mid Ming. It influenced the later Chinese intellectuals for nearly five hundred years and must be explained.

The student's exams were divided into three sessions. The first session's subject was classics, or the *Four Books and Five Classics*. The second session tested students' formulation of practical writing. The third session's subject was policies on current affairs, which was like asking you to analyze on a given issue. This was much like a practical subject essay. Among them the most important was the classics, which was the key of becoming a scholar.

[91] This is not the title of an imperial reign year. This is a regular Chinese calendar year name.

The students then were not like the students now, who must review many materials before an exam. For them, all they needed to do was to be able to recite the *Four Books and Five Classics*. The test questions could be just from here and there was no possibility of any other questions. The scope was narrow and it was easy to recite. There was also the mandate that the number of words in the essay was limited to no more than five hundred words, unlike today's named subject, on which writings can easily exceed one thousand words. The test of then seemed to be easier, but in reality it was not so.

The key was the format and personal expression. An octet-essay consists of an opening statement, a supporting statement, an introduction, an in-depth analysis, a starting segment, an exit statement, a middle segment, a rear segment, and an ending segment, and a conclusion. Among them, the essential ones were the starting, middle, rear, and ending Segments. The four segments might not be written at will. They must be written in rhyming paired words. There are total of eight segments, thus the name octet-essay.

This style of writing was very rigid and you were not allowed to write even one more word. It was profoundly injurious to people's mind. Many men had to improvising nonsense as they wrote just to make up the required number of words to satisfy coupling of the phrases. By just looking at the words, they looked neat and orderly. But reading them, it's full of hocus-pocus.

The ones suffering included not only students, but also the teachers who had to come up with questions. There are only so many words in *Four Books and Five Classics*, on which all the questions were based. In addition, questions that had been used before generally could not be used again. Thus the teachers had to use all kinds of strange tricks. They broke sentences in *Four Books and Five Classics* and used them to compile questions. For example, the head and tail of a sentence were cut off and only the middle words were used as questions. Even the teachers couldn't understand this kind of ill-phrased and misplaced questions, not mentioning the students.

The result was the confused tested the confused. Those who wrote the questions didn't know what they were asking and those who answered didn't know what they were saying. What kind of talents this type of tests selected?

After all, the octet-essay was only a format. Even if it was rigid, it wouldn't have to impose too great a negative impact. But, don't rush to judgment, the Ming rulers had another killer requirement and this was the most lethal one.

Ming required that all the essays were not allowed to convey the author's own ideas. The main idea of the essays must be stated after the ancients and the saint. Who was this saint? Zhu Xi.

Zhu Xi annotated *Four Books*, with commentaries of his own understanding. Then these commentaries caught the eyes of the rulers, who required all students must use Saint Zhu's way of thinking to answer questions.

Heaven pity all! Saint Zhu could have written down something while he was in a latrine. Then he came up with another thing while eating. It was not that precise. Then after more than a hundred years it was required that everyone must follow his way of thinking to think and it was truly a torture.

This put the Ming students in a tough situation. Even if they prayed to Heaven, He wouldn't be able to help. Who knew what that fellow was thinking? One could only rely on himself to slowly conjecture and comprehend. The saying "if you don't understand, ask someone; if you understand, teach someone; and if no one understands, ask God", was not just a joke.

For countless number of students, what they couldn't help to keep in their mind was the apparition of Zhu Xi, who had neither a handsome look nor a stocky build. By and by, some of those who saw the truth started to greet the parents and ancestors of Zhu Xi. It seemed this would give them some relief from their suppressed anger. But the problem was that after the cursing, they still had to take the exams. Not taking the exams meant no chance for offices, which was the real issue.

Limited by the pre-defined way of reasoning and format, students of Ming started to work on their essays. What amazes us is that under such difficult circumstances, students were still able to write many beautiful essays. Yours truly has read the octet-essays of two top scholars overall. The phrases were elegantly articulated and ideas profoundly argued. Considering the fact that these essays were written under so many restrictions, we the descendants can't help but admiring them.

The authors of the octet-essays skillfully took advantage of the rules and seamlessly embedded their own thoughts in the essays and the thoughts were expressed in elegant phrases. Undoubtedly they were the real winners of the well-regulated competitions.

There were many faults in octet-essay exams. Many talents discovered in this way were just book worms. The well-known Ming scholar Song Lian described some of the talents selected from the octet-essay exams, "these men, when talked to, stared with emptiness in their eyes and their tongues seemed frozen and not being able to utter anything". These men looked just like idiots.

But octet-essays had their usefulness. For example, in his novel *The Scholars*, Wu Jing Zi[92]

[92] Wu Jing Zi was a novelist of the Qing Dynasty.

wrote: "If you are really good at octet-essays, you will be able to write anything at will. If a poem wanted, then write a poem. If prosody is desired, then write prosody. One whip produces one streak and one slap produces one bloody palm." Thus octet-essays became the basis for many different forms of writing. More importantly, under such restrictions, it was easier for the best talents to shine over others. Later, Xu Jie, Gao Gong, and Zhang Ju Zheng were all the ones that scored high in octet-essays. These men were the best among the best.

Overall, there were more bad than good in this system, which restricted people's thoughts and the harm it caused was profound. Its influence was so far-reaching that until recently people were still proud of taking part in an octet-essay exam. For example, Chen Du Xiu[93] and his contemporary, the President of Beijing University, Jiang Meng Lin, were both outstanding talents of the former Qing Dynasty. Chen Du Xiu once asked what kind of outstanding talent Jiang Meng Lin was. Jiang Meng Lin replied that he was an outstanding talent on policy theory. Chen Du Xiu showed his pride and laughed out loud. He said he was an outstanding talent in octet-essays, which was more valuable than one in policy theory. Jiang Meng Lin immediately saluted. From this story we can see the influence of octet-essays.

Strife in the imperial court

After settling the matters with Northern Yuan, Zhu Yuan Zhang created a series of policies aimed at restoring production and improving people's lives, which produced good results. But now, the strife inside the imperial court intensified. The senior officials were divided into two factions on the regional lines and a new round of struggle began.

These so-called factions were in reality just associations of hometown boys, who spoke the same dialect. The largest association under Zhu Yuan Zhang was the Western Huai bloc. The head of the association would have been Zhu Yuan Zhang, but because he also had the job as the emperor, Li Shan Chang acted in that capacity as the head. This bloc had more members and was more powerful. Among the major members were Li Shan Chang, Guo Xing, Guo Ying, Tang He, Zhou De Xing, the dead Chang Yu Chun, and others. These men could be said as the original gang who helped in Comrade Zhu Yuan Zhang's rise. Contemporaries were proud of speaking in the Western Huai dialect.

Some friends may ask, who the hell was Li Shan Chang, why was he the first among the officials of outstanding services? Indeed, he didn't seem to have any real major accomplishments. But that was because of the nature of his job. He was mostly responsible for

[93] Chen Du Xiu is well-known in China. He was one of the founding members of the Chinese Communist Party.

logistics and administrative work. If Liu Ji could be compared with Zhang Liang[94], then Li Shan Chang would be Xiao He[95]. He had followed Zhu Yuan Zhang all the way in his conquering of the world and worked hard. Logistics was not an easy job, which was both onerous and easy to attract criticisms. Zhu Yuan Zhang was a man who understood all these. Thus after the nation was created, he chose Li Shan Chang as the first of the men of distinguished services and appointed him the prime minister.

Li Shan Chang's personality was that on the surface he was debonair and tolerant, but on the inside he was narrow-minded. If anyone affronted him, he was determined to get rid of this opponent.

Just like the usual saying evil-doers have ones that do evil to them, if there were ones who were power-grabbers, then there were ones who wanted to grab power from them. Very soon, the Western Huai bloc got its opponent, which was the Eastern Zhe bloc. Its head was Liu Ji.

The two blocs started the fight under the eyes of Zhu Yuan Zhang, who seemed to be interested and ready to watch a good show.

The protagonists of the play were Li Shan Chang and Liu Ji. But it would not be enough if there were only the two protagonists. Next we will introduce the supporting actors and extras. There are many of them and they are all powerful and are the inseparable parts of the play.

There were officials whose job was to find faults.

Their title was imperial censors. Next we will introduce these people.

What kind of official was an imperial censor? By its name, it was an official who censured others. In later Ming, some called them imperial scolders. In reality, they were the products of Ming's supervising and control system.

At the founding of the nation, Zhu Yuan Zhang copied Yuan's system and created the Censorate. In year fifteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1382), Zhu Yuan Zhang changed its name to the Censorial Council, whose heads were the left and right censor general. Everyone usually can hear this title in television shows. The main members of the Censorial Council were the supervising censors. There were thirteen circuits of supervising censors, allotted to among the thirteen provinces at the time. It totaled one hundred ten men, whose powers were enormous. They supervised everything. Because they usually got nothing else to do, they roamed around. They could go to the Ministry of War to investigate people on sinecures or the Ministry of

[94] Zhang Liang was one of the major advisors of Liu Bang, the first emperor of the Han Dynasty. He developed major strategies that helped Liu Bang to defeat the Qin forces and other forces of the former Warring State nations to create the Han Dynasty.

[95] Xiao He was another major advisor of Liu Bang's. He was instrumental in ensuring Liu Bang's forces were always well supplied. He was the one that developed many of Liu Bang's policies. He was named the prime minister after the dynasty's founding.

Justice to investigate wrongful convictions or cases of misjudgment. They were feared by all officials on duty.

Some may ask, given that these people were so powerful, what could be done if they were the ones that sought personal gains and violated the laws. In talking about this, we must greatly admire Zhu Yuan Zhang. He came up with some very clever ways to regulate the actions of the supervising censors. First, when selecting the censors, only those pedantic bookish moralists, who were strict followers of rules, were picked to do the job. Because doing this job would offend many people with little financial gains, a moralist was the best choice. In addition, he used little guys to curb the big guys. These censors were all officials of grade seven. They were just officials insignificant in rank and they got the power to supervise their superiors, which limited their actions so that they wouldn't dare to be too arrogant. One of the titles was eight prefectural circuit censor (there is one in a Stephen Chow[96] movie). Upon hearing of it, one may guess that because it's the censor of eight prefectures, it must be a high level position. In fact this was also just an insignificant position, which was usually a supervising censor temporarily appointed by the imperial court. It was like a commissioner who ranked very low but was given enormous power. But even with this, Zhu Yuan Zhang still had concerns, thus he created another team to supervise the Censorial Council. It was the palace emissaries of the six offices.

Parallel to the six government ministries, Zhu Yuan Zhang set up six offices. Each office had one appointed palace emissary, ranked at regular seventh grade. There were a left and a right palace emissary, ranked at sub-seventh grade. The power given to these officials was appalling and beyond people's imagination.

If they thought there was anything improper in an imperial order sent on behalf of the emperor, they would be able to reject the order! They inspected the work assigned by the emperor to the ministries once every five days. If someone procrastinated on the work or too slow to get it done, they would secretly report back to the emperor. After the work was finished, the ministries had to go to the six offices to settle the expenses. In addition, at the end of year, the officials' job performances were reviewed by these palace emissaries.

The uniqueness about these people can be summarized as, if you beat me, I'm going to reproach you. This is no joke, they were never rude and all they did was using their mouth and the written memorials. If you offended him, you'd be in a wretched situation. These people were capable of extremely skillful way of reproaching others. They were all well-read men. When they reproached someone they made use of classical references. If you read less you would think they were praising you. But when you went back to home and read the book,

[96] Stephen Chow is a Hong Kong movie star.

you would then see clearly what was said to you, even your eighteenth great grandfather could also be reproached. This kind of skill of reproaching without using foul languages was really powerful. The secret family technique passed on from generation to generation. At the era of the East Wood Party it reached its zenith. Eloquent and making all kinds of references to classics, someone would be able to disguise mean spirits in beautiful and elegant verses. In the words of Ge You[97]: "You don't even know someone is reproaching you!"

Having recruited these people, Zhu Yuan Zhang himself soon got a bitter taste of it.

One incident illustrated the sternness of the censors. In one of the years of Martial Splendor, Censor Zhou Guan Zheng was patrolling the Gate of Heavenly Dedication. By the way, Zhou Guan Zheng was a censor of municipal patrol, which was the lowest ranked supervising censor. While he was patrolling, he saw a group of eunuchs escorting some female entertainers walking into the Gate of Heavenly Dedication. According to the regulations of Great Ming on the inner palace, female entertainers were not allowed to go in. Zhou Guan Zheng immediately went to stop them. The head eunuch sneered at him and said: "I have the imperial decree (note the significance of this statement)!"

If it were some ordinary man he would have given them a pass. But Zhou Guan Zheng insisted that the inner palace regulations of Great Ming couldn't be violated, even for someone with an imperial decree. He adamantly refused to allow the female entertainers to go in. When the eunuchs met such a man, they could do nothing but to petition to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who could only produce a bitter smile. He sent an oral order to not let the female entertainers in. Also, he especially added, "Zhou Guan Zheng, good job, go back and take a break". On any account, Zhu Yuan Zhang did all he could to maintain the dignity of Zhou Guan Zheng. But something unexpected happened.

Zhou Guan Zheng wouldn't leave by any means. The pedant wouldn't give up one inch of ground. He insisted on Zhu Yuan Zhang to come out to tell him. Zhu Yuan Zhang understood that the men he had picked wouldn't go easy on anyone. Entertainment had to be put aside, he changed to official attire and went out of the palace to placate Zhou Guan Zheng, to whom he said, "You have done the right thing, I regret what I have done. I'm not going to use the female singers." Only after hearing these words, did Zhou Guan Zheng went home to sleep.

Such was the absurdity of ten thousand years! An emperor's oral instruction wasn't enough and he even had to come out in person to offer his apology! While we are applauding this pedant, shouldn't we also be admiring his courage and rectitude? It was for these men of principles that the Dynasty of Great Ming lasted for two hundred prosperous years.

[97] Ge You is a Chinese film and TV star.

It should be pointed out that this supervising system created by Zhu Yuan Zhang was a pretty good system.

But be careful, if you are from neither one of the thirteen offices of censors, nor one of the six offices of palace emissaries, nor a censorial official, then shut up! Do not be fooled when you see the censors were allowed to flout the authorities in front of the emperor, if you dare to utter a few words, it'd be a magic if your head was not chopped off. The censorial officials dared to act that way because there was a long tradition of it.

Since ancient times, there had been positions for censors. These men weren't responsible for any practical matters, their job was to criticize. Thus it became a tradition throughout generations of imperial dynasties that there was no execution of censorial officials. There had been many asinine emperors, but very few of them had the guts to execute censorial officials. Therefore in the imperial hall there was often such a scene, below, the censor criticizing the emperor proudly without reservation, like no one could do anything to him, while the emperor could only listen while gnashing his teeth and perhaps contemplating "I'll get you after I remove you to another position." A censorial official indeed could have his moments of glory.

The story above is not told to just explain the power and prerogative of censors, there is another purpose for the story.

Everyone can see from this incident Zhou Guan Zheng overdid his job. Using today's phrase, he was just too serious. The emperor had many things to do, when you stopped the female entertainers, the emperor sent his oral order and praised you, which ought to be enough. But when you insisted on that the emperor to come out to explain everything to you in person, then from where could he find the time and patience with you. Zhu Yuan Zhang was the one that created the system, thus he had to be exemplary. But for emperors after him, if at the crack of dawn he was asked to get up and come out in the cold wind to explain everything to you, then even a mild tempered man would be irritated by these censors. Thus this trait of the censors determined the deviation of certain degrees in their future development. We will see later the great influence of the deviation to the country.

The cast is filled. Now let us look at how the show was played.

Liu Ji and Li Shan Chang

Let's first look at Li Shan Chang, the head of the Western Huai bloc. He was cited as the first for outstanding services by Zhu Yuan Zhang. He was conferred the title of the Duke of Han, which was extraordinary because at the time Zhu Yuan Zhang conferred only six dukes.

The other five were Xu Da, Chang Mao (son of Chang Yu Chun), Li Wen Zhong, Feng Sheng, and Deng Yu. Readers know the capabilities of these five fellows. They were all eminent generals of a generation, having been through bloody battles. But unexpected by all, Li Shan Chang was ranked atop all of them, in the first place.

He also was the only civilian officer among the dukes.

On the other hand, Liu Ji also made great contributions to Zhu Yuan Zhang's cause in conquering the world. But he was only conferred with title of the Count of Sincerity. Worthy of consideration was his allowance was also the lowest among the counts, which was only 240 dan[98]. Li Shan Chang's allowance was 4000 dan, a dozen times of that of Liu Ji's.

People of later generations often weren't able to understand the difference. Liu Ji contributed plans and strategies that resulted in victory after victory. In many important decisions, he played the critical role. Why did he receive such kind of treatment?

Actually if one thinks deeper, he will find the question is not hard to answer. Zhu Yuan Zhang was a man who valued hometown fellowship. Li Shan Chang was his fellow townsman and for many years he worked behind the scenes. He never showed off himself and did his job silently. This was a man that Zhu Yuan Zhang could trust. On the other hand, Liu Ji was an alien townsman. More importantly Liu Ji was better at assessing situations than him!

From the Battle of Dragon Bay to rescuing Anfeng, what Zhu Yuan Zhang could think of he also was able to think of, what Zhu Yuan Zhang missed he still was able to think ahead.

If you were an emperor in his stead, would you tolerate such a man next to you? Besides, all of these strategies were not policies for bettering people's lives. They were all tactics for power struggles, which would be very useful in conducting cabals and coups. In addition, Liu Ji was also a virtuoso of *The Art of Black and Thick*. Often at times Zhu Yuan Zhang recalled of his suggestion to not to rescue Han Lin Er. Who would know whether if he would do the same to him?

It was already not bad that he wasn't executed, too daring if he wanted more rewards.

Liu Ji was a savvy man for all of his life but he missed this point.

Because of this, it would be difficult for him to be the victor in this struggle.

In year one of Martial Splendor, the two sides had their first confrontation.

At the time the prosecutorial agency was the Censorate, which was created after the similar Yuan agency. Liu Ji's official position was the minister of the Censorate. In other words, he

[98] Dan was a weight and capacity unit in ancient China. Initially it was used to measure grains and later was used as a monetary unit as well, particularly for salaries of government officials. One dan is about 120 pounds in today's weight. Thus one dan's pay was roughly the price paid for 120 pounds of rice or other crops.

was the head of the censorial officials. Previously we have explained the power of the censors. For the moment, the advantage was on Liu Ji's side.

What started the confrontation was a man named Li Bin, who was a confidant of Li Shan Chang's. He was arrested by Liu Ji for violating the law. After the investigation confirmed the crime, Liu Ji decided to execute him. For the time being Zhu Yuan Zhang was on a trip. Li Shan Chang immediately went to Liu Ji to ask for a favor. But Liu Ji wouldn't budge, even more, he also reported this matter to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was then enraged and ordered an immediate execution of Li Bin. By chance the reply fell into the hands of Li Shan Chang. Although he wouldn't dare to conceal it, he was furious. He understood it would be a vain effort to plead to Liu Ji directly. To save his confidant's life, he came up with an excuse. He was convinced that if he told this excuse to Liu Ji, he would not refuse his plea.

He went to see Liu Ji and said to him: "It hasn't rained for a long time in the capital city. Sir, you know astronomy well, the time doesn't seem to be right for executions." This shows Li Shan Chang was shrewd and crafty, he knew fully well that Liu Ji was an expert astronomer. He wanted to use it as an excuse. If Liu Ji insisted on killing Li Bin, he would be responsible for no rain. In that era there was no modern weather forecast, who the hell knew when it would rain.

But Liu Ji's reply was: "Execute Li Bin and it will rain!"

Li Bin was thus executed.

Li Shan Chang was infuriated. He started preparing for his first retaliation.

It should be noted that Liu Ji should have some confidence for him to have the guts to say something like that. He was indeed well versed in astronomy and weather. But the problem was that even in today's weather forecasts, there are inaccuracies.

This time Liu Ji was unlucky. It still didn't rain for a long time. Once Zhu Yuan Zhang came back, the energy that had been accumulating inside Li Shan Chang erupted. He instigated people to attack Liu Ji. Zhu Yuan Zhang was a wise man, he didn't trouble Liu Ji. But Liu Ji knew this was not a place for him to stay any longer. Thus in August, he requested a leave to return to home.

Before his leaving for home, a sudden impulse came into Zhu Yuan Zhang's mind. He wanted to make Fengyang a capital and at the same time was actively preparing the expedition against Northern Yuan. Liu Ji made his last suggestion to Zhu Yuan Zhang. It was absolutely impractical to make Fengyang the capital, and also Northern Yuan was still very powerful, thus it was unwise to launch an expedition. Realities later proved he was right again.

It should be observed that for the time being Zhu Yuan Zhang understood Liu Ji very well.

He once said to Liu Ji's son: "Now in the whole imperial court, all the civilian and military officials are partisans, Liu Ji is the only one that doesn't do that. I see clearly and I'm not going to treat him unfairly."

But Zhu Yuan Zhang this time was deceived by Liu Ji, who was not a man of pure virtue. Before he left, he already deployed his pawn, Yang Xian.

Yang Xian was Liu Ji's henchman. He received Liu Ji's instructions and succeeded him as the minister of the Censorate. He was preparing a counter attack against the Western Huai bloc.

This Yang Xian was not a simple one. He drew in his claws and supported people like Gao Jian Xian, utilizing the prerogatives of the censors, and kept nit-picking on Li Shan Chang. He kept reporting to Zhu Yuan Zhang and said Li Shan Chang was inept and lacked moral authority and shouldn't be trusted with important duties. Zhu Yuan Zhang was not a stupid man and he knew Yang Xian's motive. In the beginning he was not swayed. But after some time, he also grew his own opinion about Li Shan Chang, to whom the criticism grew. In November, he recalled Liu Ji and put him in charge of important tasks. The Western Huai bloc was completely suppressed.

The Eastern Zhe bloc seemed to be on the verge of declaring victory, which worried Li Shan Chang very much. He understood he had become a target. He needed to learn from Liu Ji and find a proxy. But the proxy must not be someone who commanded high esteem. He must be someone easy to control. For this purpose his choice was Hu Wei Yong. But he didn't expect this choice would put him on a road with no return.

Hu Wei Yong was Li Shan Chang's townsman. He followed Zhu Yuan Zhang since a very early time. But he didn't get his chance to show himself. He always got some low level jobs like a county magistrate. But he was a very capable person. At Li Shan Chang's blessing, he became the new leader of the Western Huai bloc. This round of struggle would end in his hands.

Just when the Eastern Zhe bloc was at the acme of its glory, things changed again. Because Liu Ji was too blunt in his conversations, using today's words, he lacked the arts and techniques in communicating with people, many people began to say bad things about him to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who, despite being very intelligent and savvy, grew suspicious of him. Thus there was that conversation that determined Liu Ji's fate.

Tests in a conversation

One day, Zhu Yuan Zhang summoned Liu Ji for a one on one conversation, which began

like a chat about families. Just when the atmosphere was getting more amicable, Zhu Yuan Zhang suddenly changed his facial expression. He asked Liu Ji in a stern tone: "if Li Shan Change is to be replaced, who could be the prime minister?" Liu Ji was very alert and replied immediately: "This has to be decided by Your Majesty."

Hearing this answer, Zhu Yuan Zhang seemed to be satisfied, he then continued: "What do you think of Yang Xian?"

This was another trap, Zhu Yuan Zhang knew Yang Xian was Liu Ji's man, thus he first picked this man out to test Liu Ji.

Liu Ji now understood this conversation was a very precarious one. If he was not careful, he would lose his head! He replied immediately: "Yang Xian has the talent to be the prime minister, but he doesn't have the magnanimity. He can't be the one."

But the test was far from over. Zhu Yuan Zhang continued: "How about Wang Guang Yang?" This was the second trap. Wang Guang Yang was not a member of the Western Huai bloc. Zhu Yuan Zhang suspected he was caballing with Liu Ji, thus for the second one, he named Wang.

Liu Ji deflected the trick as it was thrown to him. He replied: "This is a shallow man, he can't be the one."

Zhu Yuan Zhang looked at Liu Ji in admiration, what a smart man.

He uttered his third choice: "What about Hu Wei Yong?"

Liu Ji exhaled with relief and told his most accurate assessment of his life: "Hu Wei Yong now is a calf, but in the future he will for sure rid himself off the restraint of the yoke!"

After saying this, Liu Ji took a deep breath. He thought the test was over, but he was wrong, the next question was the fatal one.

Zhu Yuan Zhang finally tossed out his killer trick. He said in a tune that meant a lot: "It seems that my prime minister can be no one else but you."

Usually after an extreme anxiety, one tends to let his mental guard down. Liu Ji's was no exception. He finally made a mistake and this time it was a fatal one.

Without thinking carefully, he replied to Zhu Yuan Zhang: "I don't deny that I know I am capable, but I resent evil like no other, Your Majesty can take your time to pick." This statement was very inappropriate. In addition to claiming that he had the capability to be the prime minister, he also said things like resenting evil like no other. If it was like as Liu Ji said, who was the evil?

His befuddling was not over yet, he added: "Presently, in my opinion no one is qualified."

After this there would exist a permanent schism between Zhu Yuan Zhang and Liu Ji.

Thereafter Liu Ji lost Zhu Yuan Zhang's trust. Although he knew his position was not as strong as before, he still stuck to his post in the imperial court and led the Eastern Zhe bloc. But Zhu Yuan Zhang wasn't someone easy to dispatch.

In year three of Martial Splendor, Zhu Yuan Zhang personally wrote a letter to Liu Ji, telling him, "You are in your advanced years, you should go home to spend time with your wife and children, why bother to stuck with me here?"

In other words, I am going to fire you, go away. Liu Ji had to return to his home. Now, Yang Xian, the other stalwart of the Eastern Zhe bloc lost Liu Ji's protection. He was quickly marginalized by the Western Huai bloc. He couldn't even save his own life and was executed by Hu Wei Yong on a lame charge.

In this struggle, the Western Huai bloc achieved the final and complete victory.

Liu Ji understood he had lost. His only hope now was to spend the rest of his life peacefully at home. But in this struggle, the loser had to pay.

Hu Wei Yong became the prime minister. He didn't give up on Liu Ji. He conspired to get his subordinate to bring charges to Liu Ji. By now Liu Ji was no longer in office, what sort of charge could be brought against him? But just like the usual saying, if someone was determined to penalize you, he didn't need to find excuses for charges, which is indeed a saying of ultimate truth. Liu Ji's crime was he took possession of a piece of land of royal spirit. The so-called royal spirit was really something no one can explain. There it was and there it wasn't, all depended on your purpose.

Thus Zhu Yuan Zhang issued an imperial edict to penalize Liu Ji. He held no office, so what else could be the punishment? Zhu Yuan Zhang found a way, he cut Liu Ji's pension.

Liu Ji felt hopeless. But his wisdom once again exhibited its power. He didn't stay put and waited for death. Unexpected by everyone, he returned to the capital.

This was indeed a masterful strike. He knew the real reason behind Hu Wei Yong's mistreatment of him was Zhu Yuan Zhang. As long as he stayed in the capital and under the watch of Zhu Yuan Zhang so that the emperor didn't have to worry about him, his life would be secure.

But this time he was wrong again.

In January of year five of Martial Splendor, Liu Ji fell ill. Zhu Yuan Zhang sent Hu Wei Yong (note this) to see Liu Ji. The doctor who came with Hu Wei Yong prescribed some medicine. Liu Ji took the medicine and the illness worsened. Soon after, he died.

As to the cause of Liu Ji's death, later when Hu Wei Yong's case came into light, the doctor confessed. It was Hu Wei Yong who instructed him to poison Liu Ji, which became one of the accusations against Hu Wei Yong.

But many people knew Hu Wei Yong had grudges against Liu Ji and Zhu Yuan Zhang also knew it. But he still sent him to see Liu Ji. To someone as influential as Liu Ji, Hu Wei Yong wouldn't be so bold to act alone. Otherwise he wouldn't have let Liu Ji roaming freely under his watch. He probably had Zhu Yuan Zhang's acquiescence. Regardless if it was instigated by Zhu Yuan Zhang, undoubtedly, Zhu Yuan Zhang bore responsibility for the death of Liu Ji.

Throughout his life, Liu Ji had been intelligent and resourceful. He made extraordinary contributions to the founding of the Ming Dynasty. He was accurate in assessing situations. His reasoning was water tight. He was capable of predicting the development of events, although he wasn't someone who could summon wind and rain at will, like what was said in the folklores. But based on his judgment and prediction ability, to say that he could predict things like a god wouldn't be an over statement. He had, like Zhuge Liang, become an idol of wisdom and memorized by ordinary people.

In my opinion, he truly deserved this exceptional honor.

Chapter Seventeen

The Case against Hu Wei Yong

Hu Wei Yong was victorious. He defeated the Eastern Zhe bloc with the help from Zhu Yuan Zhang and eliminated the world's top strategist Liu Ji. Now he held great power, even Li Shan Chang sometimes would have to yield to him.

But, was he really the final victor?

He didn't understand the real reason for his victory. He wasn't any better than Liu Ji. Rather it was because Zhu Yuan Zhang stood on his side. Zhu Yuan Zhang saw very clearly the struggle between the two factions. He didn't come out to intervene because regardless who came out victorious in this struggle, the final victor was always him. Between Landlord Hu and Landlord Liu, regardless who won, it didn't matter as long as Landlord Zhu was secure at the top spot.

Zhu Yuan Zhang chose Hu Wei Yong not because he was strong. On the contrary, it was rather because Hu Wei Yong posed a weaker threat to Zhu Yuan Zhang. Thus Zhu Yuan Zhang made Hu Wei Yong the winner. But the foolish Hu Wei Yong wasn't able to see this.

Thus, after crushing Liu Ji, Hu Wei Yong became more audacious. He received bribes and was corrupt. He pushed aside anyone who disobeyed him. He even dared to challenge Zhu Yuan Zhang's authority. He intercepted the reports to Zhu Yuan Zhang without authorization. Promotions or demotions of officials and executions of convicted were all done without the approval of Zhu Yuan Zhang.

In year six of Martial Splendor (AD 1373), Hu Wei Yong pushed out Wang Guang Yang, the other prime minister, and became the sole prime minister. He was in power for as long as seven years.

But mysteriously, Zhu Yuan Zhang did nothing to stop Hu Wei Yong's apparent contemptuous acts, which was very unusual.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was a man full of lust for power. He fought and survived in blood and death and was the most outstanding man of the era. Li Shan Chang, who was only a little

bureaucrat, was ordered to retire. Then who the hell was Hu Wei Yong? He had neither any military achievement nor administrative accomplishments, how dare he was so audacious!

This is really puzzling. Many historical documents have all kinds of stories about Hu Wei Yong's unlawful conducts and Zhu Yuan Zhang's willful ignorance, thus arriving at the conclusion that Hu Wei Yong's actions deserved the punishment and Zhu Yuan Zhang had the rights for self-defense.

If we peel off the skin and analyze the true nature in the core, we can see there are deeper reasons in it.

The Duke of Zheng[99], who is well known historically, was never loved by his mother. His younger brother, spoiled by his mother, also made all kinds of unreasonable demands on him. But the Duke of Zheng always satisfied him. Until finally when his brother attempted to overthrow him, did the Duke of Zheng send forces to destroy his younger brother.

Posterity usually thought the Duke of Zheng did all he could in being generous to his brother. His generosity has been highly praised in history. But some people also pointed out that the Duke of Zheng was the veritable false gentleman. He wanted to end the life of his brother, whose illegal activities were overlooked on purpose.

Once we get a deep understanding of this story, we arrive at a distinct conclusion of Zhu Yuan Zhang's unusual behavior, this was a setup.

This setup has gotten different jargons in different language expressions. In one idiom, it's called 'let it go loose before capturing it'. In a scientific name, it's called 'kill by exultation'. In everyday language, it's 'to acquire something, something else must be given'. In the words of *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*[100], it's called 'don't be too joyful today, the account will be settled someday'.

But we still have another question, to deal with a relatively insignificant Hu Wei Yong, did it really require Zhu Yuan Zhang to cerebrate so much and endure for as long as seven years?

Indeed, if we carefully analyze history, we can see that Hu Wei Yong was definitely not the real target of Zhu Yuan Zhang. The real thing that Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to destroy was the behemoth behind Hu Wei Yong.

Zhu Yuan Zhang willingly tolerated Hu Wei Yong's domineering behavior and allowed

[99] The Duke of Zheng was the duke of the State of Zheng in the Sprint Autumn Period, not a Ming duke.
[100] Zhang Ga is a child soldier who is the hero of an early 1960s Chinese movie. The story was set on the backdrop of the Sino-Japanese war in the 1940s. It was originally a novel and later made into a movie. There is also a TV series of the same title. It's unclear if the quote is taken from the novel, the movie, or the TV show. Most likely the quote is taken from the TV show.

the clown to fully exhibit himself. Using a phrase commonly found in the game of Weiqi[101], it's 'not befuddled by small gains, but aim for bigger prize'. He had been through so many tribulations. The heroes of the era, Chen You Liang, Zhang Shi Cheng, and Wang Bao Bao, were all not of his match, how could the little Hu Wei Yong be!

He repressed himself so much because his opponent was too strong. The opponent was neither Li Shan Chang nor the Western Huai bloc. Instead it was the one behind Hu Wei Yong, the bureaucratic ministerial system of prime ministers that had lasted for thousands of years.

Ever since Zhu Yuan Zhang became the emperor, he always thought the system put too much constrain on his power. He always thought the world was won by his own efforts. But someone else rather wanted to share the power, where did that rational come from!

But the system had lasted for many years. From senior officials to ordinary people, everyone thought the post of prime minister was indispensable. To abolish this system, there must be sufficient evidence. The arbitrary and contemptuous conducts of an immoral man like Hu Wei Yong just provided him with a good excuse.

He quietly watched Hu Wei Yong and waited for the opportunity to come.

Hu Wei Yong's strategy

Although Hu Wei Yong was a completely despicable man, he wasn't stupid. As his behavior became more and more out of the norm, his fear of Zhu Yuan Zhang also grew stronger. But Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't touch him, which was ominous to him. To a certain extend he knew Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was a man who wouldn't do what he wanted to do unless he was sure it would be done thoroughly and completely. He never compromised from that.

After a long deliberation, Hu Wei Yong came up with a marvelous idea. He would drag some others in.

To him, if he was not to be killed by Zhu Yuan Zhang, he needed to ensure there were enough people on his side. Laws wouldn't be enforced if too many violated them, you Zhu Yuan Zhang just can't kill all the officials.

As to the tactics, they are simple. First, an appropriate target is chosen and then a position is promised. Let us all dine together, take a bath, thereafter some entertainment follows[102].

[101] Weiqi, also known as Go, is a board game. The board is a 19x19 grid. Two players take turns to place black or white stones on the board. Whoever occupies more area wins the game.

[102] The author is using a more contemporary social phenomenon that was very popular in China when corruption was more rampant in late 1990s and early 21st century. Senior officials in the Chinese government routinely entertained each other and

After they think they've got close enough, they will be able to find a topic of common interest to both of them. In this period, one needs to invest some emotions. If during the conversation some drops of "earnest" tears can be shed, then the effect will be much better.

After a round like this, both men become diehard bothers. After that, for the union they swear oath, they will share their wealth if some comes up, or they will suffer together if things don't go right.

If one carefully analyzes the phrase 'drag someone in', then he will find there are many problems with it. If it's about going to some good places, someone doesn't need to be dragged in. If it's about going in and one must be dragged, the place is either a boiling oil pot or a pit full of fire. Thus it's really, 'if it's bad, you go and you bear all the blames.' If there's any trouble, the oath of course will be transformed into 'If there is any suffering, you endure it alone. If there's any fortune I share with myself alone.'

The ones that got dragged in by him in this way included Lu Zhong Heng, the Marquis of Ji'an, Chen Ning, the minister of the Censorate, and Military Governor Mao Xiang, among other important senior officials. For the time being, the imperial court was full of Hu Wei Yong's eyes and ears.

But Hu Wei Yong was not satisfied. He also wanted to woo the most important person, Li Shan Chang.

Because Li Shan Chang not only was regarded as a moral authority and highly esteemed, he also had an invaluable treasure, the imperial iron certificate of immunity.

It's necessary for us to explain the thing, imperial iron certificate of immunity. In Ming, the highest reward the emperor could confer on someone was the iron certificate of immunity. If an official violated the law and Guards in Brocade went to his home to execute him, the death penalty would be avoided if he didn't lose it (probably no one would want to lose it) and was able to show it before the knife fell on his head. Many senior officials, for the sake of their heads, tried all they could to get one, because any gold or silver certificates wouldn't be as useful as the iron certificate. Those who were fortunate enough to have one would exhibit it in the main hall of his home. He would show it to anyone who visited, as if with this iron certificate he had two heads.

Li Shan Chang was someone who possessed such a treasure. In addition, he got two. Because of the two iron certificates, Hu Wei Yong tried very hard to fawn over him. Although Hu Wei Yong himself couldn't get them for his own use, as long as Li Shan Chang was alive,

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rich people with lavish diners and spa treatments, which sometimes involve prostitution. The spas often featured public and private baths. Unlike in the western culture, Chinese men don't feel anything inappropriate in taking bath together.

he had his protection behind him.

But the utility of such an iron certificate was problematic. Because the certificate was issued by the emperor, it's like a check. If it can be cashed all depends on the bank that issued it. The emperor was the bank issuing the check. If he said the thing was valid then it would be valid. If he said the thing had expired then it was expired. It's hard to imagine if an emperor wanted to kill someone and he would change his mind because of an orally issued check. This is just like, using a phrase we often say today to describe this, "If I can elevate you up, I can also put you down."

Look at this in another way, there are also many variables. The emperor didn't have to actually kill you. He could put you in prison and beat you to half dead. Then without anyone's knowledge, he could find someone to harm you and make a report that you died of a sudden disease. This satisfied not only his reputation, but also his desire, with one move he got both. It's really not that I'm not honoring my words, it's really because you are unlucky.

But at the time both Hu Wei Yong and Li Shan Chang regarded the two checks highly, which showed that, comparing to that of Zhu Yuan Zhang's, their political skills were just at elementary school level.

When Hu Wei Yong exposed his intent, Li Shan Chang ignored him. He was different from the stupid Hu Wei Yong. He had seen in his own eyes numerous heroes and men of outstanding abilities fell in the hands of Zhu Yuan Zhang. He fully understood Zhu Yuan Zhang's menace. He wouldn't make the foolish mistake to take on Zhu Yuan Zhang. He never thought the little guy who was hand-picked by him now would disregard his own ability to take on Zhu Yuan Zhang. He even wanted to drag him in. Alas, time had changed, he resolutely refused Hu Wei Yong's request.

Although Hu Wei Yong wasn't good at assessing situation, he was rather apt in assessing people. After he found that Li Shan Chang wouldn't take the bait, he started courting Li's relatives. Fortune had it that Li Shan Chang's younger brother Li Cun Yi was the father of Hu Wei Yong's son-in-law. Thus Hu Wei Yong was able to drag Li Cun Yi in. After receiving the bribes, Li Cun Yi started to lobby Li Shan Chang. In the beginning Li Shan Chang sternly upbraided Li Cun Yi. But after a while, he acquiesced. He said something of profound meaning: "I am old, after I am dead, take care of yourself."

In this way, Li Shan Chang was dragged in.

Hu Wei Yong finally felt secure. The whole imperial court is filled by my men, what you Zhu Yuan Zhang is going to do about me! If you can be the emperor, why can't I be!

In hindsight, he was indeed a clown who didn't know how high the sky was and how deep

the earth was.

But Hu Wei Yong's activities indeed presented a difficult problem for Zhu Yuan Zhang. After all, so many senior officials were with Hu Wei Yong. Zhu Yuan Zhang had to consider how to divide and disrupt them so that he would be able to destroy Hu Wei Yong's power. But it was easier said than done. It was indeed a tough problem.

But after Zhu Yuan Zhang heard the report from his spy on Hu Wei Yong's unusual activities, the problem was solved by just one sentence, which showed his exceptional skill.

"Well, then execute them."

Life for life

On the matter of killing men, Zhu Yuan Zhang had always done what he said. He stoically watched Hu Wei Yong's every move on the sidelines and was ready to see the kinds of tricks he could play. But Hu Wei Yong was also actively preparing to deal with Zhu Yuan Zhang. He knew sooner or later he had to confront Zhu Yuan Zhang face to face.

The day came very soon.

In an outing, a son of Hu Wei Yong's fell from a horse and died under the wheels of the carriage. Hu Wei Yong, enraged, killed the carriage driver without informing the legal authorities. The matter was forwarded to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who ordered Hu Wei Yong to explain it.

Hu Wei Yong rushed to Zhu Yuan Zhang's place. On the way there he already conjured up all the excuses and verbiages. Once he saw Zhu Yuan Zhang, he wasted no time to bemoan about his own suffering. He whined about his miseries, how filial his son was, and how the carriage driver didn't obey the traffic rules and drove over the lines, etc. But Zhu Yuan Zhang's expression was very strange.

He was silent and stared at Hu Wei Yong without emotion.

Hu Wei Yong still didn't get it and continued to whine about his sufferings. Once he found out that in this conversion of two people, only one of them was speaking, he stopped and looked at Zhu Yuan Zhang. He found that Zhu Yuan Zhang was also looking at him.

There was a dreadful silence.

Zhu Yuan Zhang finally stood up and walked to Hu Wei Yong. He said in a not very crisp but calm tone: "life for life."

Then he walked out briskly and didn't look at Hu Wei Yong again.

Hu Wei Yong was stupefied. He remained seated in his chair, stared ahead, and transfixed.

Suddenly, Hu Wei Yong's hands trembled. He tried to suppress his hands using his body to no avail. His whole body started trembling, just like someone suffering from epilepsy.

He couldn't control the terror in his heart and it was a natural reaction of his body.

When he was deliberating with his cronies at home, he thought Zhu Yuan Zhang was weak and wouldn't be able to stand a strike. He had his men in every ministry but Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't have anyone close to him. As the number of his collaborators grew, he felt the strength of his power. Amid the flattering of his collaborators, he seemed to see he was about to take Zhu Yuan Zhang's place and become the supreme ruler!

But when he saw Zhu Yuan Zhang's eyes for real, he began to realize he was far inferior comparing to the man in front of him. He was a talented man, but his opponent didn't seem like a man, rather, the man was a chilly glistening knife.

How did Zhu Yuan Zhang come to this point? He came through from the thunderstorms in a straw hut to the forlorn candle light in the Temple of Imperial Awakening and from the flashing knives and slashing swords in Chuzhou to the raging fires shooting to the sky in Lake Poyang. He came out of the combats of thousands of troops and stood up from mountains of dead bodies and seas of blood. He experienced innumerable sufferings and endured countless pains. He was not afraid of any authority. He didn't fear any enemy. One by one the fiercest men fell in front of him. He saw more dead men than Hu Wei Yong saw the live ones!

Hu Wei Yong finally understood why Li Shan Chang wasn't willing to make himself an enemy of Zhu Yuan Zhang. It was not because he wasn't ambitious but it was because of fear.

Without even starting, Hu Wei Yong already knew he had come to the wrong stage. He really was a player of different class from that of Zhu Yuan Zhang's.

But it was already too late to regret. He just had to walk to the end of the road.

There are many different versions of what ensued. Many history documents recorded that Hu Wei Yong was preparing for a coup and was exposed and therefore Zhu Yuan Zhang reacted and finished Hu Wei Yong. But there are also documents that indicate the incident had something behind it. In my opinion, the latter may be more credible.

In October of year twelve of Martial Splendor (AD 1379), the Nation of Zhancheng (in present day central Vietnam) sent representatives to Nanjing to pay tribute. But Hu Wei Yong didn't report this to Zhu Yuan Zhang, which would constitute a major diplomatic blunder. When Zhu Yuan Zhang learned that the diplomatic corps arrived in the capital, his rage that had been accumulating for a long time finally erupted. In harsh words he severely reprimanded Hu Wei Yong and Wang Guang Yang (at the time he was the left censor general), who were responsible for the incident.

In retrospect, at this moment, the most correct way to react by Hu Wei Yong was to admit the mistake. No one could avoid from dozing off occasionally. But instead he and Wang Guang Yang assigned the blame to the Ministry of Rites. He thought by doing this the matter would be settled.

Zhu Yuan Zhang fully displayed his creative thinking and used it in the handling of this matter. He didn't allow himself to be led by Hu Wei Yong and investigate who did it. Rather he first had Wang Guang Yang executed and then sent all the officials who were involved in this matter to prison.

If it surely was him if not you, then I can't be wrong if I have all of you arrested.

The knife was already placed on Hu Wei Yong's neck and it was just a matter of time when it would fall down.

He didn't have to wait for long.

Tu Jie was one of Hu Wei Yong's stooges. His official position at the time was the minister of the Censorate. Everyone should be already familiar with this job title. He played a very important role in Hu Wei Yong's clique. He stirred up propaganda to attack their political enemies and caballed and conspired seditious acts. He was not missing in any of those activities. Hu Wei Yong always took him as his confidant.

But this confidant used his own action to explain the meaning of a diehard, a fellow who would send you to death.

When he saw Hu Wei Yong was on the verge of collapse, he reported Hu Wei Yong's plot to the emperor. Zhu Yuan Zhang was just waiting for this moment. He immediately ordered the execution of Hu Wei Yong, Chen Ning, and the other important members in Hu's party. He also executed all of Hu Wei Yong's close relatives[103]. Then he ordered more thorough investigations on how involved this matter was. If an investigation turned up something to be true, those involved would be immediately executed!

Thus the prelude of the historically famous case against Hu Wei Yong was unveiled. In fact, it was very hard to verify something through investigations, because it was too tedious. But it was rather easy to just execute a whole bunch of people. The interrogation method used at the time also provided the convenience for the progression of the case. When a suspect was arrested, the first thing done by the officials who conducted the investigations was not to treat the suspect with coffee or tea, but a severe beating, everything else was second. Fellows who held grudges against the suspected officials also would take the opportunity to experience the

[103] This is a special and most severe punishment for the most serious crimes like treason. The relatives executed included the immediate family members of the convicted, his parents, and his spouse and children.

sensation of hitting their enemies. It was all a matter of official business and of course a reasonable thing to do in taking revenge on personal matters.

Then it was the inquisition about collaborators. How could those bookworms sustain those kinds of beating, thus the hokey pokey confessions yielded many so-called collaborators. The suspect would confess all the ones he knew, met once, borrowed money from, or repaid debt, or any name he could come up with. The officials who were in charge of the investigations were naturally very happy. They reported to the emperor and then went to arrest the others. Thus the case grew larger and larger. From the start of the case in year thirteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1380), investigations continued for several years and the number of executed exceeded ten thousand.

The plan and organization that had been carefully orchestrated for many years were thus destroyed. In fact, it was very easy for Zhu Yuan Zhang to eliminate him. It was just like nipping an ant.

Regardless from which angle to look, Hu Wei Yong was only a clown, whose only effective accomplishment was dragging ten thousand people to the underworld with him.

We almost forgot that the informant Tu Jie. His end was rather dramatic. The man who played a comical role in the case against Hu Wei Yong was escorted to the execution ground soon after the whole thing unraveled. He was executed along with Hu Wei Yong. Who knows what went through their minds when they met each other in the execution ground.

Hu Wei Yong was dead, which was exactly the result Zhu Yuan Zhang needed. Now he sat in his throne and looked down at his officials, the wretched survivors, who served in the same imperial court as Hu Wei Yong and more or less had some contacts with him. They saw their colleagues were dragged out and executed one after another. Fear filled their hearts.

Isn't it the time to end this? We just want to live.

Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't think so. In his mind, there were still many things to do.

Be patient. The show just got started.

It should be noted that just one month after Hu Wei Yong was executed, Zhu Yuan Zhang eliminated the position of prime minister, a position that had continuously existed for almost a thousand years. The Secretriat was abolished and other agencies were set up to disperse the impacted personnel. Such a big change was carried out very quickly and without a hitch, which leads us to believe that he had prepared for it. It was just like Song Jiang in *Tales of the Marshes*, after Chao Gai's death, he refused to succeed. But once he "reluctantly" accepted it,

he immediately organized a big celebration[104].

Anyway, Zhu Yuan Zhang achieved his goal. Prime minister, a position that was loathed by him finally disappeared. Everything was in his grip. But he didn't realize that to his dynasty and his descendants, it was the biggest mistake of his life. To explain this issue, we need to explain why there must be the position of prime minister. Let us explain in the following section.

How a prime minister was made

Many friends may ask, isn't it already more interesting in knowing just the historical facts? Why bother with explaining all these essential things? We think it's necessary for everyone to know the benefits of doing this.

Everyone knows that historical facts are rich and colorful and there is more wiggle room in describing them in writing. It's more interesting when it's read. But the so-called essences and workings of history are rather boring. On the other hand, knowing and understanding the essences and workings will enable you to have unimaginable ability.

It's evident that many people admire Zhuge Liang and Liu Bo Wen, two idolized figures of wisdom. They usually were able to predict the developments of events. Although they lived in countryside and went into cities for no more than a few times a year, they were able to gauge the trend of the world and accurately predict future directions. For example, Zhuge Liang in *The Dialog in Long Zhong* and Liu Bo Wen in the Battle of Anfeng. Why were they able to know what would happen in the future?

This is because they were not satisfied with just looking at things on the surface. They understood deeply the inner workings of things. We know what intimidate people the most is unknown. If one knows his own future, he won't be afraid. But before the advent of time machines, we can only learn from Comrades Zhuge Liang and Liu Bo Wen. Next time when you read a history book about some peasant who started a revolt, then you will be able to predict his future without needing to read further. As long as this man wasn't eliminated in the rebellion, then you can be certain there would be one more landlord in the next dynasty. This is the power of laws about how things work. When you have taken hold of the inner workings and essences of things that are unknown to others, you have taken hold of the key to opening the future!

I want to discuss and study with everyone the laws of history, not just for the purpose of

[104] Song Jiang and Chao Gai are both leaders of a rebel organization in the novel *Tales of the Marshes*. Chao Gai was the one who started the rebellion and later Song Jiang became the leader after Chao Gai died.

showing everyone the growth paths of emperors, princes, generals, and minsters. More importantly, I hope by such studies and discussions, every one of us can be on the same path as Liu Bo Wen and Zhuge Liang.

I firmly believe this is very possible.

Let's start right here. I am still going to use my own method. This time our protagonist is still Zhang San, who just finished becoming a landlord. This time we will still use him as the main character. But in this chapter on prime ministers, he can't be a prime minister at once. He needs to be a village chief first.

Zhang San becomes the chief of some village. He needs to take care of the village. Every day he walks from the east end of the village to the west end of the village. He notices the door of family A is not properly locked and the couple of family B is not quarrelling. It's a small village and he can go back and forth two or three times a day. After that, he goes back home to sleep. This is the administrative life of a village chief.

Soon Zhang San becomes the mayor of the town. The town is big and he needs to spend one whole day to go one entire round. Thus he starts to go around once every two days and hands the job of going around the villages to the village chiefs.

Due to his outstanding job performance, Zhang San becomes the county magistrate. He no longer goes around anymore. He uses all of his work time to review and approve reports from town mayors, whom he completely trusts.

Thereafter Zhang San gets frequent promotions, from prefecture magistrate to governor, then to prime minister. The whole country is under his supervision (we assume there is no emperor). Now Zhang San gets busy, he doesn't even have time to read reports. He sees numerous people and his work lasts into evenings. The heads of every ministry need to see him and he alone needs to make decisions on the proposals submitted by these ministries. He is really tired and thus he gets someone to help him and shares some of the power with him.

It's roughly like this. Zhang San's position is like an emperor. The one he gets to help him is the prime minister in the real world.

Because there is too much work and the capacity of an emperor is limited, he has to find someone and share some of his power with him.

We can assume that everyone understands the reasons for having prime ministers. Although the story is simple, it embodies a very essential theory in political science, the theory of checks and balances.

There were no fewer emperors in history who were not inferior to Zhu Yuan Zhang in wisdom. But they all adopted the system of prime ministry. In imperial societies where

emperors were the despots, emperors weren't willing to share their power. Because if power was shared with others, they themselves ran into the risk of being checked. But the limitlessness of the imperial power ran contrary to the limitedness of the emperors' capacities, which inevitably led to the creation of the system of prime ministry.

In truth, the prime minister is indeed an annoying guy. He constantly criticizes the emperor and is able to refute the emperor. As an emperor, one won't like this fellow. He thinks this man is no more than an employee he hires to do the work. He gives him work and authority, but the man wants to be on everything.

He is on not just the matters of the country, but also on the emperor's private matters. He will mind if the emperor wants to renovate the house and say that it costs too much. He will mind if the emperor wants to travel and say that it burdens the people. There are aggressive guys that even mind the emperor's eating, rest, and sleeping with his wife. In addition to interfering, they also have compelling arguments in the name of "for the health of Your Majesty". On his face he shows an expression of being troubled. It seems just like that the emperor owes him two hundred bucks.

In the end, who is the boss and who is the employee?

The problem is you cannot show your temper because those aristocrats are watching you. You have to accept his criticism in good manner. If you lose your temper and scold him, or even worse, penalize him, then trouble comes. Truth is always on the side of the prime minister, history documents will record he is not afraid of speaking his mind, and you unfortunately earn the bad reputation for not listening to criticisms. The officials under him are also on his side and look at him with admiration.

Those prime ministers also understand this very well and they are eager to follow the footsteps of their predecessors, as though it would be the best if you have beaten them.

Alas, these nasty guys.

Because of these reasons, emperors didn't like their prime ministers. They were all like Zhu Yuan Zhang and eager to eliminate the position. But the problem was if the position was eliminated, all those things would have to be done by themselves. But after laborious struggles and becoming emperors, they didn't want to work, they wanted to enjoy life. They were not triathlon iron man athletes. They didn't have the powerful stamina. Thus the position was always kept, until Zhu Yuan Zhang became the emperor.

Since childhood, Zhu Yuan Zhang had been hard-working and was capable of enduring hardships. The youthful fellow had an excellent constitution. He was vigorous and had a good appetite, capable of gorging down several bowls of food. He was not only a championship

level athlete in iron man races, but also probably practiced long distance running and thus had exceptional stamina. For him, sending the prime ministers home meant nothing more than just working a little bit more. He would have to work harder, but it was nothing to him. Thus the glorious stories of the model worker Zhu Yuan Zhang were recorded in history.

Wu Han did some calculations. From September 14 to 21 in year seventeen of Martial Splendor (AD 1384), in only eight days, he received 1666 official documents, totaling 3390 work items. On average, he reviewed 200 documents and processed 400 items per day.

These are terrifying numbers. There were no labor laws in Zhu Yuan Zhang's time, so even if he worked for eight days he received no overtime pay. But he worked just like that without respite, which made him despise those who said a lot but couldn't get straight to the point. There was a famous story as an example. Ru Tai Su, the minister of revenue and population, once submitted a report to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who got someone to read it for him. It took almost three hours to read just half of it. It was full of Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors[105] and Virtue and Morality[106]. Zhu Yuan Zhang took immediate action, he stopped the reading and counted the number of characters, it was already more than ten thousand.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was livid. He immediately ordered Ru Tai Ru to come to see him and let the guards give him a severe beating.

Thus it can be seen that after abolishing the office of the prime minister, Zhu Yuan Zhang paid a heavy price. But he didn't seem to mind. In his view, all he needed to do was just work more. But the matter was not as simple as he thought.

To further explain the checks and balances between the emperor and the prime minister, we use another way to illustrate it.

The relationship between the two sides can be described using the game Tug of War. The emperor and the ministers are on the two ends of the rope and both pull the rope toward their sides. There is no referee in this game but there is an unsaid rule that either side shouldn't play it too hard. The back and forth of the two sides should be all limited.

The limit was established through the practical politicking of nearly one thousand years. It told both sides of the game what were the things that the emperor could do but the ministers shouldn't interfere, as well as those things to which the ministers should tend and the emperor should allow.

In the gaming of nearly one thousand years between the emperors and the ministers, the rule was continuously perfected. Both sides knew what he should and could do. Under such

[105] The Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors were legendary pre-historical ancient Chinese rulers, who were the most virtuous and were the founders of the Chinese race and nation.
[106] Virtue and Morality are the main theme in Confucius's theories. Here it refers to pedantic unrealistic idealism.

rules, power reached a balance.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't obey the rule and changed everything. He pulled the rope and dragged the ministers to the ground in all directions. He also declared they were all fired and sent them away with the rope, which they could use to dry their clothes.

He seemed to think this would solve all the problems. It would be just good enough if all the power was solely in his hands and there was no need for balance.

Reality proved he was wrong. The rule established throughout history was not the little guy Zhu Yuan Zhang could change. Given that Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't like such kind of balance, the God of History would assign different opponents to him and his descendants. But these opponents were different from the previous ones.

They also disobeyed the rule.

We need to make it clear that the act of Zhu Yuan Zhang violating the rule only subjected himself and his descendants to arduous work. To the politics of the entire Ming, it was not necessarily a bad thing. Zhu Yuan Zhang hoisted a stone and dropped on his own feet but it was not on the Dynasty's.

In history and our everyday life, there are many magical rules, which cannot be seen and felt but are always in play, for example, the famous golden ratio. A pattern drawn using the golden ratio is the most beautiful and the structural division is also the most sound. Many exceptionally skillful Erhu[107] artists find that on the chord there is a position, at which the sound produced is very beautiful and pleasing. Through testing, it is found that the position is the golden divisional point of the chord.

These rules are truly magical. If you follow them, you can get the same result but with half of the effort. But if you violate these rules, you will be subjected to its punishment.

There were also such rules in history. These rules ruled everything in the dark and no one could resist them.

In this game of the Tug of War, the historical rule played its part. In over a thousand years, princes, earls, generals, and ministers found their own positions by following this rule. But Zhu Yuan Zhang was oblivious of this rule. He thought he could completely eliminate the office of the prime minister forever. To some extent, he indeed accomplished it.

He abolished the office of the prime minister and forbad the establishment of this position thereafter. He used his power to abolish the title of prime minister, but was he the real winner of this battle?

[107] Erhu is a traditional Chinese string instrument.

Reality showed the dialectics of history played a big joke on him. It created a bunch of people titled grand academician of the Cabinet. Except the title of these people was not prime minister, everything else was no difference from that of the prime minister. More ironically, they were even more powerful that any prime ministers of the previous dynasties.

They were everywhere and on everything. They not only tended the affairs of the country, but also the private affairs of the emperors. They disapproved of the emperor's discretional riding excursions (Emperor Just Virtue), use of Viagra (Emperor Grand Celebration), and the emperor's choice of his successor (Emperor Ten Thousand Seasons). They even established the eras of eminent officials attributed to themselves. Eras in which there were no checks by the imperial power (Gao Gong and Zhang Ju Zheng)!

Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to use his own force to change the balance of power that had lasted for a thousand years. In the end he was penalized by history. Zhu Yuan Zhang came to the store of history, he wanted to buy a bar of soap, but the dialectics of history instead forced him to also buy a roll of toilet paper. If Zhu Yuan Zhang in his grave knew that his action led to this kind of result, he probably wouldn't know if he should laugh or cry.

Zhu Yuan Zhang, you were great, as well as insignificant.

In front of the behemoth of the rule of history, you were so weak and tiny. Your resistance was so feeble.

The ebb and flow of history,
Vast, powerful, and undulatory,
Those obeying it flourish,
Those flouting it perish.

So true as said.

Special agents

Zhu Yuan Zhang killed Hu Wei Yong and abolished the office of the prime minister. But he didn't just stop there. His eyes turned to the House of the Grand Marshal, which controlled the military. At the time the one that controlled the military was his nephew Li Wen Zhong. Actual events showed that on distrusting his officials he was not discriminating against his relatives. He reorganized the House of the Grand Marshal and divided the military organization into five parts, Left, Center, Right, Front, and Back. As about the original Commander Li Wen Zhong, he didn't omit.

Because Li Wen Zhong once accused him of killing innocent civilians and also affronted him before, Zhu Yuan Zhang decided to send the Buddha to the West, to have Li Wen Zhong killed together with the reorganization. When he was about to act, Empress Ma came out and

stopped him. She begged him to spare his nephew's life, attributing to his meritorious accomplishments. Zhu Yuan Zhang never yielded to others. But Empress Ma had been with him through years of struggles and hardships, they loved and respected each other so much, thus he listened to her persuasion and spared Li Wen Zhong's life. But he still severely punished Li and stripped him off his official position.

Punishing Li Wen Zhong was not an isolated matter. It had its own implications. This showed all the officials that Zhu Yuan Zhang would not practice nepotism and spare no one, even including his relatives, on the matter of eliminating those who opposed him.

More and more people were implicated in the Hu Wei Yong case. To some extent it had become a massacre. Those prosecuting officials had lists of names in their hands and went to every ministry to find those named. Once they found them, they were immediately arrested and tortured. Forced confessions ensued and then the lists of names from the forced confessions were used to arrest more people. These prosecuting officials had enormous power. Even when an official was on official duty, they were able to break in and take away the so-called suspect. This resulted in some ironic scenes. Usually the magistrate had been just grandiosely sitting high and working on cases, then these people came in and grabbed the fellow down from his seat, got him fettered, and took him away, while the prisoners below stared with the eyes gaping and jaws dropped.

The leads for investigating the case originated mainly from two units. One was the House of the Captain of Imperial Guards. You may not be familiar with this name. But if its later name is mentioned, then it's something that everyone knows, the Guards in Brocade.

Actually this shouldn't have been called a unit. Instead it was rather just a group, whose members were the inspectors. There weren't any formal establishments for them. They all reported directly to Zhu Yuan Zhang on all information collected. They were the eyes and ears of Zhu Yuan Zhang. These men didn't sleep in the night. They roamed everywhere. According to historical documents, these men were very skilled at eavesdropping and tracking. For example, one day, Song Ne, the dean of Imperial College was at an imperial court session. Zhu Yuan Zhang asked him why he was not happy last evening. Song Ne was stunned. Zhu Yuan Zhang had a painting in his hand. It was a drawing of Song Ne when he was angry last evening.

This was truly something that chilled one's spine. It surely was obvious that Song Ne wasn't sleeping on the street. He was angry at his own home. The inspectors was just not only monitoring him, but also had the interest in drawing down his expression when he was angry. We all can imagine that in those times, there wasn't camera. In the middle of the night, you sat in your house and there was someone not far from you (very probably inside your house),

watching you and also did a drawing on you. Instead such a scene often occurs in modern horror movies.

The backgrounds of the inspectors were mixed. Many of them were people who had no regular jobs. Some of them were military or civilian officials. Some of them were even Zhu Yuan Zhang's old acquaintances, monks. These men didn't know each other and they took orders only from Zhu Yuan Zhang.

These men were everywhere. They got information from thin air and built many cases against innocent people. It was with the help of these people, that Zhu Yuan Zhang was able to prosecute the Hu Wei Yong case at will and kill more and more people.

Officials were antsy day and night. More and more people were dragged into the case. Even those who had already retired were taken back and arrested. Among them, the most famous one was Song Lian.

Song Lian was a famous civilian official serving Zhu Yuan Zhang. He was also an outstanding scholar. He was a townsman of Liu Ji's. He was given a very important task, as the teacher of Crown Prince Zhu Biao. He accomplished the task with perfection. Under his guidance, Zhu Biao was totally different from his father Zhu Yuan Zhang. Zhu Biao was tolerant and compassionate and showed the characteristics of a wise ruler. Later he was appointed to write *The Official History of Yuan* as the editor in chief.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't regard him highly. In Zhu Yuan Zhang's eyes, Song Lian was only a scholar, who was useful in writing essays and not capable of strategies and tactics. Thus the official position he conferred on Song Lian was just a little Scholar of the Imperial Academy (fifth grade). Till his retirement in year ten of Martial Splendor, Song Lian's official title was still a scholar.

Although Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't use Song Lian much, he trusted him. The main reason was due to Song Lian's personality. Song Lian was a well-known honest man. Regardless on anything, he always told the truth. Zhu Yuan Zhang once exclaimed: "Song Lian has served me for more than twenty years and he never told a lie and never said a bad word of others. He is truly a virtuous man."

When Song Lian retired, he was sixty eight. Zhu Yuan Zhang gave him a piece of cloth and enjoined him to use it to make a "gown of a hundred" thirty two years later. Song Lian was deeply moved with tears.

But in less than three years later, Zhu Yuan Zhang made new attire for him, a prisoner's uniform.

Because a grandson of Song Lian was part of the plot, Zhu Yuan Zhang recalled Song Lian

from thousands of lis away and wanted to execute him. This reflected the character of Zhu Yuan Zhang's, selective forgetfulness.

At the critical moment, it was Empress Ma coming out again. She successfully persuaded Zhu Yuan Zhang and spared the life of Song Lian.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's behavior became more and more to the extreme and his tactics were more and more vicious. Except Empress Ma, very few could change his mind.

In August of year fifteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1382), a person died. The death of this person didn't seem to be of any significance in history. But to Zhu Yuan Zhang, it was a real tragedy.

This person was Empress Ma.

Empress Ma

When Zhu Yuan Zhang was in dire danger, imprisoned, on the verge of dying from hunger, she risked her life to send food to Zhu Yuan Zhang. Although she was a woman, she was courageous and wise. When Chen You Liang attacked the Bay of Dragon, she donated all of her jewelries and belongings to the troops. She also organized women to mend soldier's uniforms.

Even after she became extremely rich and grand, she still kept her simple manner. She was neither arrogant, nor lavish. She advised Zhu Yuan Zhang not to forget the miseries of ordinary people. Even in using people, she also opined her own idea: "may the world be governed by all the wise men", which was taken by Zhu Yuan Zhang as a motto.

More precious than most, she stopped many of Zhu Yuan Zhang's vicious acts.

Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to kill Zhu Wen Zheng, she implored to Zhu Yuan Zhang: Zhu Wen Zheng is your nephew and made great contributions, please don't kill him.

Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to kill Li Wen Zhong, she implored to Zhu Yuan Zhang: Li Wen Zhong is your nephew and also your adopted son, spare his life.

Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to kill Song Lian, she knelt down and implored to Zhu Yuan Zhang: Song Lian is the teacher of the crown prince. Even ordinary people esteem their teachers, not to mention the imperial family.

Just like in those acts, she used her love and compassion to show concern to everyone she knew or didn't know and rescued them from under Zhu Yuan Zhang's knife.

She knew how precious life was more than Zhu Yuan Zhang did.

After she fell ill she knew it would be impossible to cure, she refused to ask doctors to treat

her. Zhu Yuan Zhang asked her for the reason and her reply was really soul moving.

She said: One's life is determined by Fate, it's useless to pray to either a god or Buddha. A doctor can only treat disease and cannot treat life. If I ask a doctor to treat me and the medicine doesn't work, Your Majesty will surely execute the doctor, which is not what I want to see.

This was a woman who always used her love to care for others. Even at the end of her life, she still was doing that.

The last words she left to Zhu Yuan Zhang on her death bed:

"May Your Majesty listen to the wise and receive criticisms. May there be a good start and good end. May our children be all virtuous and capable. May the people live peacefully. May the dynasty last forever."

Then, she died with smile on her face.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was next to her. This was the woman he loved the most in his entire life. The woman provided him with unlimited help but she never asked for anything from him. She spent her entire life just like that.

Having been through so many sufferings and tribulations, Zhu Yuan Zhang's heart had been long hardened harder than irons and stones. Ever since he lost his parents, regardless how hopeless and how miserable he was, he rarely dropped tears. He knew crying wouldn't resolve any problem.

But now, at last he couldn't control his emotions. He wailed. Only crying could sooth his grief to the person in front of him and only crying could let him release the extreme pain in his heart!

Because he found that the woman in front of him was everything to him and was the only thing to him.

Damsel Ma, an ordinary woman, in hard times she didn't give up on the pauper Zhu Yuan Zhang. She followed him and gave all she could. Regardless how bad and complicated was the situation, she always kept her own promise.

Noble or humble, life or death, I shall always be with you.

After her husband became an emperor, she still treated everyone with love. Every time Zhu Yuan Zhang raised his knife she always came forward to stop him. She used her motherly love and care that belongs only to women to rescue many people. Although in the end she couldn't pull Zhu Yuan Zhang, a train out of control, back to the track, she did everything she could do.

Today, we can say, she was a great woman.

Born like a flower in the summer,

Die like snowflakes in the winter.
Life is just like as such,
Why regret and complain so much.

The death of Empress Ma hit Zhu Yuan Zhang hard. Thereafter Zhu Yuan Zhang went farther and farther on the road of wrong and extremes, until to the end of his life.

The Hu Wei Yong case still went on, constantly there were people arrested and executed. Li Shan Chang admitted his mistake to Zhu Yuan Zhang and accepted the punishments. By chance he escaped death. But the personality of Zhu Yuan Zhang guaranteed that Li Shan Chang wouldn't have a peaceful end.

Before we describe those, we need to take a look at the livelihood of a special group in the era of the years ruled by Zhu Yuan Zhang. This group was the officialdom.

The miserable lives of the officeholders

In any other eras, being an officeholder meant having a golden bowl. But in the years of Martial Splendor, the livelihood of the officeholders can only be described in one word, wretched.

In Zhu Yuan Zhang's era, officials were like living in hell and this comparison isn't an exaggeration.

Let's first take a look at the grades of the Ming officials. We all know that grade one was at the top. There were no fewer first grade officials in every past dynasty than now. They were majestic in appearance and awe-inspiring, even emperors had to show some respect. But in Ming, civilian officials of first grade were almost like characters in fables. There were very few of them. Since the elimination of the office of the prime minister, the civilian officials of the highest grade were the ministers of the ministries (regular second grade). There were first grades but they were all officials without administrative authorities. They were the grand tutor, associate grand tutor, and assistant grand tutor (regular first grade). Master tutor, associate master tutor, assistant master tutor, grand tutor of the crown prince, associate grand tutor of the crown prince, and the assistant grand tutor of the crown prince were secondary first grade. In addition, positions like the chief of the office of royals, associate chief of the office of royals, assistant chief of the office of royals, and the grand marshal of five armies were all regular first grade. But these positions were not available to regular civilian officials.

These positions appeared to be very attractive but they were very difficult to obtain. If it was not for someone with distinguished achievements, such as campaigning in the wars in the founding of the dynasty (quota was very small and job was very risky), rescuing the emperor (high degree of difficult and very few opportunities), and pushing the emperor aside and

manipulating the imperial court by one self (there were just a few of such people), besides these, it would be already a blessing from his ancestors if someone managed to last to retire at second grade.

Even as a second grader, so be it. Civilian officials wouldn't have cared because regardless of the grade, everyone had to work. But what made them feel very unfair was there was one group of people, who didn't have any records of service, but almost all of them were at first grade.

These were the relatives of Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was poor since his childhood and lost his parents early. He was very compassionate about his relatives. Many of his sons and daughters were conferred with the titles of prince and princess, which were all first grade. Legitimate sons of princes were still princes and the other sons were conferred the title of ducal prince and they were all at first grade. Even more, husbands of princesses were also first grade (secondary first grade)!

Officials struggled hard to comprehend as they struggled hard through years of studies and in the end they could only be a minor official of grade three or four. But these people were high level officials of first and second grade at birth. It was truly, *Toilsome in book would do no better than handsome in look* (husbands of the princesses) and *Comeliness in girth would do no better than nobleness at birth*.

But more would make the officials even harder to endure, as they would soon discover, that boss Zhu Yuan Zhang was very stingy.

How much did Zhu Yuan Zhang pay his officials? The salaries of officials of first grade were 1044 dans of rice annually. Salaries for officials of lower grades were proportionally lower. The salary of a regular seventh grade county magistrate was only 90 dans of rice per annum.

We use county magistrate as an example. The monthly salary of a county magistrate was only 7.5 dans. Please note that he needed to use the income to feed his wife and children, and a large number of other people.

The magistrate of a county in Ming was very different from the head of a county today. In those years, the county magistrate was also responsible for many other duties. He was the head of the county, the county court, the county prosecutor, the county treasurer, the county tax collector, the county supervisor of commerce, and the manager of the county construction company. If a county magistrate was responsible for so many things, it was inevitable that the clerks under him needed rewards, otherwise no one would be willing to work for him.

Under him were also a bunch of aides, who had ranks such as granddaddy and deputy

daddy. Among granddaddies there were granddaddy of gate (gatekeeper) and granddaddy of reports (sStationery keeper). Under them were deputy daddies, including dispatchers and reviewers, duty officers, seal keepers, and etc. These were the office clerks in the magistrate's court. In addition, the magistrate needed to send his men to important county agencies. The magistrate also had his own cooks and secretaries.

The men of the whole gang were all under him and relied on him to feed themselves. With a salary of only 7.5 dans a month, everyone had to feed on the boreal wind.

As an official one needed to receive other officials. On holidays they had to visit each other. It was far from enough just to depend on salaries.

But even such miserly salary was discounted.

In the years of Martial Splendor, on pay day, the county magistrate would send someone with a bag to get his pay of 7.5 dans of rice (just like a beggar). It was paid full and on time. In the years of the Grandfather of Deeds, only six tenth of the pay was paid in rice. How was the rest of the salary paid?

Paper money.

This was no joke. It was not silver but rather paper money. In early years of Ming, paper money circulated throughout the country. In theory it wouldn't matter much in using paper money. But if we take a closer look we can find problems. In the years of the Grandfather of Deeds, a ten guan[108] bill could be exchanged for one dan of rice. In the years of Father of Compassion, it would take twenty five guans to exchange for one dan of rice.

Now everyone can see it. The problem was inflation.

On the circulation of paper money, it would have to start from the Yuan Dynasty. Many things went terribly wrong in the Yuan Dynasty, but the policy of issuing paper money was a good one. The ones who made that policy would have to be highly capable. The use of paper currency greatly illustrated the universal applicability of the rules of economics. The paper currency in Yuan was backed by gold and silver. If there was no gold or silver, paper money wouldn't be issued. There was quota for issuance of payer money. Holders of paper money were able to exchange for gold and silver at any time in the imperial court.

This is classical gold and silver standard paper currency system, which had been in use for nearly a thousand years (until the collapse of the Bretton Woods system after World War II). But once it was in the hands of Zhu Yuan Zhang, who didn't understand economics and saw if Yuan could put paper money in circulation, he also printed paper money. The problem was once he started printing, he didn't stop it. In the first years of Ming, the annual income was

[108] Guan was a monetary unit in Ming.

just about tens of thousands taels of silver, but paper money in tens of millions of taels of silver was put in circulation. Who would take a piece of paper, printed as five thousand taels, in its face value? People were not idiots.

To be fair, officials really deserved pity. Their salaries were already very low and still they received wads of waste paper, which would be too rough to be used as toilet paper.

One wouldn't allow himself to die of abstaining from urination. Thus all sorts of ways of making money were cooked up.

Officials mainly employed two schemes, which we will describe here. The two schemes had a long history and were very well-known.

Melting waste discount. You may have heard of the phrase melting waste. At the time, taxes were usually paid in real goods like crops and silk products. But sometimes they were paid in silver and copper coins. But there could be some silver wasted when scrap silver was melted. In this name governments collected more silver. The extra taxes collected this way was called melting waste.

In reality only the government itself knew if there was any waste, it was just an excuse for collecting more money. The scheme lasted for hundreds of years without abating. It lasted longer than the Ming Dynasty. Not until the years of Harmony and Just[109], when the government absorbed charges from melting waste, did it disappear in history.

Anyhow, in this scheme the government called the shots. It decided how much it wanted to collect. It didn't require much sophistication in actual execution. But the next scheme was different.

This tactic was called pile atop and kick it up, which is very worthy of mentioning. If people paid their taxes in crops, the government used hu[110] to collect the grain. People dumped their grains into a hu and then it was weighted to calculate the amount of grain paid. The pile of grain must be heaped up like a cone and the top portion of the cone would be over the rim of the container. Just when the payer thought he was finally done with paying the tax, something unexpected happened.

The official gave the container a powerful kick in a way as rapid as the strike of a thunderbolt! Then portions of the grain that topped over the rim of the container would fall to the ground. The payer hurried to gather up the grain. At this moment the official would yell: Don't do it, that's overhead! Hey, I'm talking to you!

This was the so-called pile atop and kick it up. The portion that got spilled to the ground

[109] Emperor Harmony and Just of the Qing Dynasty.
[110] A container and unit for measuring volume, one hu was roughly fifty two metric liters.

was considered as the portion that would be wasted during transportation, which would be the legitimate income of the officials. For the payers, they had to go home and bring more grain. The key act in this scheme was the kick.

The glamor in a kick

Take note, the kick needed a lot of skill. Officials would have practiced for a long time just for a kick. As far as practice, it probably first started with finding a tree near his home. Beginning with kicking the tree, the practice would be thought as perfect when the tree trunk wouldn't move but the leaves fell all over. Of course some people opted to practice by kicking doors. Doors must be opened by just one kick. If it took two kicks to open a door, then it was considered a failure and more practice was needed. This kind of practice was beneficial to them because just in case they quit, they could change their career to rob homes.

On this day, the officials were well prepared. Once the a hu was filled, one would concentrate his attention, withhold his breath, close his eyes and focus his thoughts, and then gathered all his power and with a thunderous cry, some even had to add a ten meter dash to aid the effort, to give the container a kick with all of his life's strength (it indeed had to take that kind of strength because everything fell on the ground belonged to himself). If someone was able to kick down more, he would burst into a loud laugh.

As to the people, they could only watch their own grain taken away by the officials.

Please note that these two schemes were only the most common methods in imperial societies. Many famous officials in Ming, like the three Yangs, Li Xian, Xu Jie, Zhang Ju Zheng, etc. all earned their living using these two tactics. And the later emperors also recognized these as legitimate income.

Although Zhu Yuan Zhang's pay policy was in part responsible for the proliferation of these acts, these shouldn't be taken as the excuse for the corruptive acts of the officials. They themselves were the deciding factor. Officials would have to find the real motive from themselves.

People may ask, were there anyone who weren't corrupt? My reply is, there were indeed some. But they paid heavy prices.

Among those who lived only on salaries, none was more famous than Hai Rui.

This fellow was truly the number one righteous man. He lived every day of his dozens years of life the same way. He toiled hard at work and never enjoyed any luxury (no money anyway). He never took a penny that wasn't his. He never did the aforementioned melting waste and pile high and kick it up. He lived every month by his meager salary. He had

nothing at his home.

His last official position was the right censor general of Nanjing, which was a second grade position, like today's attorney general, which could be said as among the highest paid civilian officials. But he couldn't afford to hire servants at his home, so he did everything by himself. He didn't eat well and suffered from chronical malnutrition. After his death, Assistant Censor General Wang Yong Ji came to arrange the funeral. As soon as he walked into the door of Hai Rui's home he burst out sobbing. He didn't expect that Hai Rui would be in such a wretched state at his death. There were used curtains hanging all over the places in his home (he couldn't afford new curtains). His clothe chests were tattered and worn-out. His family members all wore patched clothes. It wouldn't be an overstatement to describe that he had a home that only had four walls.

What was even more unbelievable to him was Hai Rui's family didn't have the money for the funeral. There was no money to buy a coffin and the money for the burial was donated.

A man of this sort also existed in Zhu Yuan Zhang's era. For example, the scholar at the House for Literary Excellence Luo Fu Ren, who was a very honest and poor man. But Zhu Yuan Zhang still did not fully trust him. One day he went to his home to see it for himself. Luo Fu Ren couldn't afford to buy a good home, so he only bought a tattered house in the suburb. After some twist and turns, Zhu Yuan Zhang finally found the place. He saw outside of two tattered tiled houses, a man was holding a bucket painting the wall. Zhu Yuan Zhang saw that the man had dirt and paint all over his face and took him as a man hired by Luo Fu Ren, thus he asked: "Does Luo Fu Ren live here?"

Unexpectedly, upon hearing that someone was asking, the man painting the wall turned his head and saw Zhu Yuan Zhang. He was shocked and hurried to kneel down and said: "I am Luo Fu Ren!"

Zhu Yuan Zhang then saw his face and recognized that the man was indeed Luo Fu Ren. Then he looked at his attire. He had a paint brush in one of his hands and the other hand holding a bucket. He wore tattered clothes and was just like a beggar. Upon seeing him, Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't know if he wanted to laugh or cry. After a long pause, he said: "How come you live in such a house?"

Luo Fu Ren replied with a smile: "I am poor, and this is all I can afford."

Zhu Yuan Zhang felt sorry for him and said: "how can a well-read man like you live in a house like this." Then he bestowed him a big complex.

Luo Fu Ren would have been considered as poor, but after all he didn't occupy a high position. There was someone even worse than him.

Among the Six Ministries, the Ministry of Personnel was the most important one. Wu Lin, the minister of personnel, was honest and uncorrupted while in office. After he retired, Zhu Yuan Zhang sent a man to inquiry on his wellbeing. The man came to Wu Lin's hometown. Considering he had been a senior high level official, he thought he ought to live in a big house and went to look for one. But after a round, he couldn't find a big house. He then stopped by the road and found an old peasant, who was planting rice, and asked: "Excuse me, where does Minister Wu live?"

But the old peasant raised his head and replied: "I am Wu Lin, what's the matter?"

The man was deeply moved. He went back and reported this encounter to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was also moved after hearing the story.

Undoubtedly these men were all the outstanding examples. But there were very few men like them who were of high morality and virtuous.

In addition to the pay system, it's also necessary to describe the holiday system. Let us take a look how ancient people spent their holidays.

Let's start with the oldest one, the Han Dynasty. They implemented a system of one holiday for every five days. That is, work for five days and take one day break. The holiday was not Saturday or Sunday, it could be any day. There was a special name for the day called "Rest and Bathe Day". On this day, officials were allowed to go home. On this account, the benefit of the Han Dynasty wasn't bad.

In Sui and Tang times, it was changed to having a holiday every ten work days and it was called "Tenth Day Break". It seemed it was not far worse than that of Han's. But in reality it was not so. In Sui and Tang times, there was already the concept of "golden week"[111]. They took seven day holidays around New Year's Day and the winter solstice day. These seven-day holidays were paid holidays. In addition, any reasons that could be thought of were also taken as holidays. Besides the usual Fifth of May, Mid-Autumn, and Ninth of September, there was also the emperor's birth day (because the emperor changed often, thus this day also changed often). Surprisingly, even the birthdays of the Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Confucius were also holidays. Probably if Christianity were wide spread at the time, the birthday of God would also be counted as a holiday.

Song Dynasty's benefits on holidays were a little inferior, but there were still dozens of holidays in a year.

In the Yuan Dynasty, things changed. To the rulers of Yuan Dynasty, life was all about exercise. Work was rest. There were no tenth-day breaks and long holidays. Everyone had to

[111] See previous note in Chapter One.

put work as the highest priority and there were only around one dozen holidays.

Finally the throne was handed to Zhu Yuan Zhang. We have described the work spirit of this fellow. He thought: It's already an excellent benefit that I pay you salary and let you take charge of things. Look back at those years, yours truly couldn't feed myself, what holiday?

Some officials proposed to reinstate the holiday system of the previous dynasties. It was denied by Zhu Yuan Zhang. Then Zhu Yuan Zhang created a holiday system, which was rather simple and easy to implement. Three holidays a year! The days were the New Year's Day, the winter solstice, and the birthday of Zhu Yuan Zhang himself.

Don't think about resting for dozens of days, you guys need to wake up!

But in practice there were many issues, for example, the separation of husbands and wives and the education of their children (these were all practical problems), which were not resolved. Thus later it was decided that there would be a winter break for a month in December, which partially resolved some of the problems.

As we've already explained before, because of these regulations, the discordance between Zhu Yuan Zhang and his officials became more profound. For their own well-beings, officials had to violate Zhu Yuan Zhang's decrees. But Zhu Yuan Zhang also wouldn't allow these violations to happen. When the conflicts accumulated to a certain points, they would erupt.

A show on history thus began.

Chapter Eighteen

Eliminate All Those Corrupted

Zhu Yuan Zhang's anti-corruption campaign

Among all the sinister acts, Zhu Yuan Zhang hated corruption the most, which is understandable. Every time he thought about the scene in which his parents dying of hunger as a result of the embezzlement by the officials of the food that should have been distributed to his parents, he couldn't help gnashing his teeth in rage. All these men should be executed!

He wanted to create a real clean and pure dynasty, in which every official was honest and virtuous and ordinary people were happy with their lives and work. He put all his energy into realizing this dream.

But dreams may not become reality.

In year two of Martial Splendor, Zhu Yuan Zhang once said the following words that were full of emotions to his officials: "When I was just an ordinary man, I saw those corrupted officials were oblivious to the miseries and sufferings of the ordinary people, I hated them from the bottom of my heart. From now on, strict laws should be enacted and enforced. There will be no mercy to those corrupted officials who dare to harm ordinary people!"

Zhu Yuan Zhang was a man of his words. He enacted the most stringent anti-corruption laws in history, anyone who embezzled more than sixty taels of silver would be executed immediately!

Even at the founding of the dynasty, sixty taels of silver was not a large amount. This edict showed Zhu Yuan Zhang's resolve against corruption.

To enhance the effect of the shock, Zhu Yuan Zhang also set up an appalling policy.

Since Tang and Song, there had been many differences in political systems and configurations of agencies. But the layout of county government buildings remained mostly unchanged. There were the main gate, the warning stone, the drum tower, and the inner gate. But in Ming, between the main gate and the inner gate, there was an additional temple of the God of Earth, which shouldn't be visited in the night because it was very terrifying.

What was the purpose of having a temple of the God of Earth? Don't be surprised, this place was used for skinning, for skinning humans.

Zhu Yuan Zhang ordered that after a corrupted official was executed, he would be skinned and then his hide was filled with straw and made into a straw man, which was hung by the side of the seat of the official for the public to see. The straw man was not intended for scaring away birds, it was for deterring other corrupted officials.

One of the first ones who enjoyed this high level treatment was Zhu Yuan Zhang's old subordinates, Zhu Liang Zu, who was a famous dynasty founding general and made great contributions. He was conferred the title of Marquis of Yongjia and governed Guangzhou. He was thus both of high nobility and powerful. But this man had a fatal flaw, he was haughty and arrogant.

The Panyu County (present day Panyu District of City of Guangzhou) Magistrate was Dao Tong, who was an honest official. Because he strictly enforced the laws, he ran into confrontations with the local strongmen and lords, who were manhandled by Dao Tong but couldn't do anything against him. Thus they courted Zhu Liang Zu and hoped he would back them. The simple minded Zhu Liang Zu took their bribes and promised to help.

Thereafter Zhu Liang Zu confronted Dao Tong many times and interfered with Dao Tong's efforts to enforce the laws. He also sent mob to ambush and beat Dao Tong. But Dao Tong didn't budge and continued his fight against Zhu Liang Zu.

The confrontations escalated and finally reached to a climax. Dao Tong arrested the tyrannical Luo brothers. But Zhu Liang Zu boldly sent troops to surround the county government and took the prisoners out by force. He also sent a report to the emperor, accusing Dao Tong with a litany of charges.

Dao Tong couldn't endure anymore. He also followed up with a report to the emperor to explain everything. But he forgot Zhu Liang Zu had faster horses, an edge over him that he didn't have.

The horses available to Dao Tong were the horses of the relay posts. But the horses used by Zhu Liang Zu were cavalry horses. Zhu Liang Zu also predicted Do Tong would send a report, thus he sent his men to select the best horses and rushed to the capital. The report censured Dao Tong severely. Zhu Yuan Zhang was a man with a hot and quick temper. After reading Zhu Liang Zu's report, he immediately sent men to arrest and had Dao Tong executed.

Soon after Zhu Yuan Zhang issued his order, Dao Tong's report arrived. After comparing the reports, Zhu Yuan Zhang saw problems and immediately sent men to retract the order. But it was too late. Zhu Liang Zu got Dao Tong executed.

Dao Tong was of high morality and honesty as an official. He had no savings. What he worried the most was there would be no one to care for his mother after his death, thus he entrusted his friends to care for his mother. Then he faced the execution with dignity and ease.

At his execution, countless number of people went to bid farewell to him.

Justice was in people's heart.

Zhu Liang Zu was exuberant. He finally defeated Dao Tong. He thought he and his strongmen and lords would be able to sleep peacefully.

Although it seemed to be so, Zhu Liang Zu still felt uneasy. He followed Zhu Yuan Zhang in combats and he knew the man was someone who, in dealing with matters, would either do nothing or do everything to the end. Nonetheless, Dao Tong was just a little county magistrate but he was one of the generals that helped founding the dynasty and held the title of marquis. He therefore thought Zhu Yuan Zhang wouldn't touch him just for a little low level official.

Zhu Liang Zu's calculation seemed to be correct. For a while, there wasn't any reaction from Zhu Yuan Zhang. Thus he finally put his mind at ease.

Precisely for this reason, when the officials from the Office of Crime and Prosecution came with Zhu Yuan Zhang's written order to arrest him, Zhu Liang Zu was very surprised. Although he had troops under his command, he wasn't insane to the point to dare to confront Zhu Yuan Zhang. He very obediently tendered his command and went to the capital to face charges from the officials of the Office of Crime and Prosecution.

But the officials weren't in a hurry to depart. They rather asked him: "Where is your son Zhu Xian?"

This time Zhu Liang Zu was stunned, he understood the meaning of this question.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's philosophy was: "Do it not, or do it all."

On the road Zhu Liang Zu still had his hopes. He thought he had accomplished a great deal and made great contributions. His only fault was killing a county magistrate. The most Zhu Yuan Zhang would do to him was probably to admonish him and wouldn't kill him.

But there was always a gap between hope and reality.

On September 3 of year thirteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1380), Zhu Liang Zu and his eldest son Zhu Xian were brought to face Zhu Yuan Zhang, who didn't waste a word and fully exemplified his spirit in doing things hands-on. He at once whipped Zhu Liang Zu. The guards saw that the emperor himself was in action and thus were very enthusiastic, by Zhu Yuan Zhang's acquiescence, all went into action. Zhu Liang Zu and his son Zhu Xian thus were whipped to death.

"Whipped to death", mulling these words should send chills through one's spine.

After executing Zhu Liang Zu and Zhu Xian, Zhu Yuan Zhang ordered the execution of all the bullies who were involved in this matter. Considering Zhu Liang Zu's past contributions, he allowed keeping Zhu Liang Zu's body intact. Zhu Xian and others were all skinned and exhibited at the public gathering places for people to see and serve as deterrence to others.

The method Zhu Yuan Zhang used to handle this matter made many officials cringe. And inadvertently Zhu Liang Zu also established a record. He was the first official that was beaten to death in the imperial court.

But he wasn't the last. Thereafter, beating an official to death in the Court, a unique scenario in Ming continued. In the whole Ming Dynasty, many honest and vocal officials lost their lives to this extreme punishment.

Hence after, Zhu Yuan Zhang's attitude became harsher to the corrupt officials. He made a policy that the previous imperial rulers wouldn't even dare to even think of. That was, any commoner, upon finding an official of corruptive conduct, would be allowed to arrest the official and send him to the capital to face charges. And all the inspection posts on the way must give the pass. If anyone stopped them, he would be executed. In addition, all of his near relatives would all be executed! There had been no other instances of this kind in the Chinese legal systems in China's history.

But the policy was not feasible in practice. It was rarely implemented in Ming.

Comparing to censures by the public, the main source of information in Zhu Yuan Zhang's campaign against corruption came from his informants, who were the inspectors that we have mentioned earlier. These men were deployed throughout the country and they would report immediately as soon as they found corruptions, law violations, and other offenses. And Zhu Yuan Zhang also brought out his fighting spirit. Even if it was midnight when the intelligence was sent to the capital, he would immediately get up to receive the report.

Even when a corrupted official received a red packet[112], there would be government prosecutors to ask him the next day and got him arrested to face charges. By any means it was highly efficient.

With all these methods employed by Zhu Yuan Zhang and his full cooperation, corruptions should have been wiped out. But the situation was not as simple as he imagined.

Zhu Yuan Zhang enacted laws and specified that the penalties were limited to caning, clubbing, imprisonment, banishment, and death. It is easy to understand these five

[112] Giving a red packet is a popular way of gift giving in modern China, usually in a small red paper bag stashed with some money. Now generally it means gift giving, usually in small amount, particularly to children.

punishments in words. In fact, in imperial China these punishments were not considered severe. This was also an improvement after Zhu Yuan Zhang thought that the criminal punishments of the previous dynasties were too harsh.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang was not someone who played his cards by the rule. In dealing with corrupted officials and the ones who opposed him, his methods were not limited to just these.

In his implementation of the criminal punishments, no other method was more infamous than execution by slicing the flesh of condemned piece by piece. The condemned was tied to a pole and was slowly sliced. If the executioner was very skillful, the condemned would suffer. It was said the record was more than three thousand cuts. The condemned was still alive after all the flesh had been cut off.

In addition, there were gutting (you know what it means), washing (dousing the condemned with boiling water and then scraping the skin using a steel brush), scaling (drying the condemned by hanging him on iron hooks), castrating, and removing the knee caps, etc.

But despite facing the terrifying arts of death, officials still came forward one after another like death squads in teams and groups to subject themselves to Zhu Yuan Zhang's instruments of punishments.

Since the founding of Ming, corruptions never ceased and Zhu Yuan Zhang couldn't keep up with executions. According to statistics, there were tens of thousands officials executed for corruption and receiving bribes. By year nineteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1386), very few officials of all thirteen provinces throughout the country, from prefectures to counties, could finish their terms. Most of them were executed. At the time it wasn't necessarily a good thing being a government official. It would already be a blessing if someone could peacefully live to retirement and if so, someone could proudly say Amitabha.

Zhu Yuan Zhang had a hard time to comprehend why these well-read men, who took "Once learning the Tao in the morning, die without complain in the evening" as their mantra, transformed into ones who "Once obtaining appointment in the morning, corrupt with no qualm in the evening", after they became officials.

Banging his head, he still couldn't find a clue. But he was clear on how to deal with these people, kill them!

But after killing one bunch, there came another bunch. Zhu Yuan Zhang was mad, thus he enacted even stricter laws: "I want to kill the corrupt officials, but I don't know why when I just finished the executions in the morning, you affront me in the evening. Don't blame me, from now on, anyone who receives bribes, without the limit of sixty taels, will be executed!"

But even this didn't stop the corruption. There were fewer and fewer officials. Thus there

was such a comical record in history records: “In this year three hundred sixty four were awarded degrees and appointed to government posts, all of them were distinguished scholars and students of Imperial College. A year later, six were executed.”

It seems this is not a big number. But don’t jump to the conclusion yet, there is more: “Ones who were in office but on death row, imprisonment, or to be banished: three hundred fifty eight.”

Now everyone can see. There wasn’t a single one missed in the three hundred some. Now, we delve into more about death row, imprisonment, and banishment.

What is in office but on death row, imprisonment, and banishment? This was a unique scene in Ming. When many of those arrested were arraigned, they would find that, while in office, the officials who were handling their cases were also fettered just like themselves. There were even others monitoring them behind them. Except they were wearing official attire, they were just prisoners.

These kinds of situations occurred because too many officials were executed and there was no one available to do the work. Although Zhu Yuan Zhang was industrious, he wasn’t able to replace all officials. Thus he created this system of “in office but on death row, imprisonment, or banishment”. The actual implementation was, if an official was found guilty of violating the law and was sentenced to death, he was first clubbed dozens of times. As soon as his wounds were tended with medicine and he thought he was about to die, a few men suddenly came out of the prison and dragged the official out to a carriage and sent him to the government offices to work.

Die? That’s too easy for you, there’s still work to do!

The result was the officials on death row sentenced the prisoners kneeling below to death and then he went back to Zhu Yuan Zhang to announce his own death.

I’ve done my job, it’s now up to you to kill or cut me into pieces.

All those should be killed had been killed, all those who should be imprisoned had been imprisoned, and all those who should be banished had been banished. Don’t trouble yourself anymore.

From the above we can see Zhu Yuan Zhang put in great efforts in his campaign against corruption. But the result wasn’t good, which is worth more analysis. Usually at the beginning of the founding of a dynasty, officials were honest. But it was unusual in the Martial Splendor era that there were so many officials executed for corruption.

It should be pointed out that there were problems in Zhu Yuan Zhang’s policy making and implementation. The main reason for corruption was certainly the illegal acts of the officials.

But official's low pays and Zhu Yuan Zhang's harsh methods were the other most important reasons.

Chapter Nineteen

Injustice

The two cases that we will describe below should explain some of the problems. These are the case of the empty seals and the case against Guo Huan, among the four major cases of Martial Splendor.

The case of empty seals

It should be pointed out this was indeed a case of injustice. And its wide and profound impact was very rare.

Let's first clarify the time of the start of the case. According to *Annals of Criminal Law*, the case first took place in year fifteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1382). But according to the records of those involved in the case, the actual time it first took place was in year nine of Martial Splendor (AD 1376). Currently this theory has not been widely accepted. In this book, we follow the theory that it first took place in year nine of Martial Splendor.

The case was originated like this, Ming regulations specified every province must send representatives to the Ministry of Revenue and Population to report the finances of the local governments, and the books reported by the local governments must be identical to the ones audited by the ministry. Only after that, could the local government's fiscal plan be certified as completed. If they didn't agree, even if there was only one digit wrong, the books must be filled out again. What made it more difficult was all the amended books must be certified with the seals of the original local governments.

This regulation doesn't seem to be too hard to implement. But at that time, it was very difficult.

Let it be known that at that time there were neither highways nor railroads. Every prefecture and county must send their couriers, who carried the books, to the capital. The first requirement of the couriers was they needed to be very healthy, because the whole trip was very arduous. There were neither cars nor trains that you could take. You had to ride horses,

boats, and the horses again. Sometime you may even have to do some mountain climbing.

For example, if you were an official from somewhere in Guangxi and if you wanted to go to the capital city, it would take one or two months at the fastest speed. If you departed on the first day of the year, when you arrived at the capital, it would be already March of early spring. In sweat, you rushed to the Ministry of Revenue and Population and compared the books, and then you found one number wrong.

All right, nothing more to say, go back my fellow brother, I'll be waiting for you.

Once again it was a race on the road, first on horsebacks, then on boats. You went back and amended the books, sealed them. I'm on my way!

Four months already passed, now it was already summer. You raced to the capital and saw each other again. Brother, you are finally here again, I've been waiting for you for a long time, let's continue.

This fellow was unlucky, after comparing, there were errors at other places. Nothing more to say, go back again. Next time remember to wear more clothes, the winter here is very cold!

You raced back again. Coming back, this time everything agreed, but it was already almost next year. You don't need to go back, spend the New Year here because the books will have to be redone.

It was basically like this. If there was always such kind of toil, no one would be able to endure it. After some analysis, officials found the key was the seal. Because paper and brushes were all available, if the books were wrong, it would be easy to fix. But the seal couldn't be carried with you. If you took away the seal, by no means could the lord official use a seal carved out of a carrot to stamp official documents. At that time very few dared to be in the business of carving official seals privately on streets. So an idea popped up, if they could just carry some blank papers with the official seals, everything would be resolved.

Thus, carrying sealed blank paper became an unwritten rule at the time. Everyone across the imperial court knew it, except one person.

Unfortunately, the person was Zhu Yuan Zhang.

In year nine of Martial Splendor, Zhu Yuan Zhang all of a sudden discovered this so-called secret. Officials dared to carry out this kind of trickery under his very eyes!

He was enraged and he thought he had been taken. Thus he sent officials to do a thorough investigation of this matter.

Fairly speaking, if there was a real investigation, the issue was not hard to explain. In fact the officials who were sent to do the investigation knew the whole story. But a strange

phenomenon emerged, everyone knew the reason for the matter, but nobody said anything.

Thus there was an ironic scene, the officials who were doing the investigation knew it, officials who answered also knew it, and only Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't know.

It's not hard to explain the phenomenon, because officials were afraid.

If someone submitted reports to explain, then he would well be thought as a conspirator or supporter. No one wanted to bear such kind of responsibility.

At this moment, a courageous man stepped forward. He was worthy of admiration because he wasn't an official. He was only an ordinary student. To some extent, he was just a commoner.

Zheng Shi Li's candid words

This man's name was Zheng Shi Li. He didn't have anyone or group backing him, all he had was his courage to tell the truth.

Taking advantage of the opportunity that allowed ordinary people to directly write to the emperor, he wrote a very long letter to Zhu Yuan Zhang. The letter was famous in history. In his letter, Zheng Li Shi explicitly pointed out that the books were sealed on the seams between pages and they were note sealed on each page. Also the numbers for the crops and funds were all different and must be verified one by one, thus it was very difficult to ensure they were identical. And that explained the reason for the blank pages with seals.

In fact Zheng Shi Li not only were courageous enough to speak candidly, he was also smart. He postulated that Zhu Yuan Zhang probably was too shameful to admit mistakes, thus at the end of the letter he also tried to help Zhu Yuan Zhang. He wrote: In fact Your Majesty also cares about the well-beings of the ordinary people. You worry the corrupted officials would use the books with blank sealed pages to harm the people. You are all for the welfare of the people.

Here is Zheng Shi Li's explanation: Your Majesty the Emperor is not wrong, the officials are not wrong, and of course I, as a humbled man, am also not wrong. No one is wrong and it's just a misunderstanding, just a misunderstanding!

The reward Zhu Yuan Zhang gave him was sending him to hard labor.

It was because Zheng Shi Li greatly underestimated Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was not a foolish man, also not a man who wouldn't admit his mistakes. Actually from his numerous informants, it was very easy for him to get to the bottom of it. If he wasn't able to get to the bottom of this matter, the Ming Dynasty's name wouldn't be Zhu anymore.

Then why did he insist on punishing these officials?

The real reason was kept in his own heart.

Zhu Yuan Zhang never trusted those officials, which stemmed from his childhood experiences. He knew very well the official's abilities in committing corrupt acts. In his view, these men couldn't be trusted, although they were now working for him.

Taking into account of all factors, the reason that Zhu Yuan Zhang was so much impacted by the case of empty seals was because he thought the officials were ignoring his authorities. They were bold enough to seal documents without asking his permission. They were defying his authority.

You are so damn audacious, such that you dare to purloin my power just to avoid work. Today you seal documents without my authorization. If I let you get away, tomorrow you will put the seal on my head! It won't do if I don't get everything in order.

Zheng Shi Li was sentenced to perform hard labor. As a commoner, he didn't have the opportunity to witness the royal prestige and wasn't lucky enough to enjoy the glory of being an official. He had nothing but by his own courage in endeavoring to achieve a great deed. Because of his gallant act, the ordinary man, who was neither a royal nor a famous official, was recorded in *The Official History of Ming*.

In the *Biography of Zhen Shi Li* of *The Official History of Ming*, we see audacity.

This kind of man will not be forgotten by us.

Comparing to the officials who were charged in the case of empty seals, Zheng Shi Li was lucky.

Given the nature of the case was already determined, what was left were only penalties. The problem was sealed blank pages were used by almost all the prefectures and counties in the entire country, how could these prefecture and county officials be all killed?

This was another difficult problem. But to Zhu Yuan Zhang, there didn't seem any problem that he couldn't solve.

He always was able to do things that others couldn't even imagine. People thought it would be impossible for him to have all the officials involved in the case executed, but in fact he did just that.

Officials, regardless where you are, either at the edge of the sky or end of the world, in mountains or plains, or in places bustling or desolate, your treatment will be all the same.

Before declaring the penalties, let us take a look at the administrative structures of the country at the time. There were thirteen provinces, more than one hundred forty prefectures,

and more than one thousand counties in the country. Many officials in these provinces, prefectures, and counties were involved in the case.

The penalties were as follow: All the seal keepers would be executed and their assistants would be clubbed one hundred times and sent to military service. In addition, many of the imperial censors in the provincial offices of prosecutors general were also guilty for dereliction of duty.

This was truly a clean sweep. Usually everyone wanted to seek higher positions. Now, one who was an assistant at least could get enlisted in the military, but the one in charge would lose his head. It was indeed that more capable ones bore more responsibilities.

In this case about sealed blank pages, many good officials who were well known for being honest were executed. Among them, the most famous one was Fang Ke Qin, father of Fang Xiao Ru, the statesman famous throughout the history for his loyalty to his emperor. The fellow was working as the magistrate of the Jining Prefecture in Shandong province. He was ethical and honest as an official. Usually he even refrained from eating meat. He wore clothes that were full of patches. Without much idea, he lost his head simply because he was the seal keeper.

But it should be pointed out that the number of officials killed in the case remains controversial. Some historical records said that the number of dead was nearly ten thousand, which should not be accurate because Zhu Yuan Zhang executed only the seal keepers. He didn't execute their assistants. Zhu Yuan Zhang was also not the homicidal maniac that people imagined. His political mind was lucid. He would not do something like killing all government officials.

From an overall analysis of the case, it can be seen that the case had almost nothing to do with getting rid of corruption. A means for making the jobs of the officials easier became a major case. Despite that everyone knew the true nature of the case and someone already submitted a petition to explain the matter, Zhu Yuan Zhang still prosecuted the case. That was something that we need to think over.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's behavior can probably be explained using a phrase shouted out by the office lackeys in *Tales of Tang*[113] when Qin Shu Bao[114] entered the prison cell: "You are in prison, one hundred contempt-suppressing cudgeling will be administered first, then we'll see if you are going to submit."

Vicious indeed was the contempt-suppressing cudgeling.

[113] A fictional novel with background set in the Tang Dynasty.
[114] Qin Shu Bao was one of the top generals who helped founding the Tang Dynasty, who was also featured in the book.

The scale and grandeur of the case was just a little brother in the four major cases of Martial Splendor. Only the case below could qualify in the class of big brothers. That was a real clean sweep, wherever it touched.

The case against Guo Huan

This case was different from the one above. There were indeed some corruptions involved. But the wide scale and large impact of it were very rare among all the corruption cases. There were also many mysteries in this case.

The matter started like this, in March of year eighteen of Martial Splendor (AD1385), censors Yu Min and Ding Ting Ju accused Zhao Quan De, an official in the Beiping[115] governor's office and prosecutor's office, and others, collaborated with Guo Huan, the deputy minister of revenue and population to commit corruptions. In the *Grand Communique* compiled by Zhu Yuan Zhang, it listed the methods and quantities of Guo Huan's corruption in detail, which was very appalling. It's necessary for us to enumerate the corrupt acts (please pay attention, the questionable points are in them), which included the following:

One, Guo Huan covertly doled out the taxes collected from Taiping and Zhenjiang prefectures. In other words, Zhu Yuan Zhang never received the money and crops from these areas as they were all taken away by Guo Huan himself.

Two, Guo Huan covertly doled out the autumn harvest from Zhe West. The actual numbers were like this, for that year, the money and crops collected were four million five hundred thousand dans. Guo Huan only sent two million dans to Zhu Yuan Zhang and he kept the rest to himself for him to dole out.

Three, Guo Huan created many fictitious fees in tax collection, including water transportation fee, ground transport fee, labor meals fee, storage fee, vine basket fee, bamboo basket fee, and religious service fee.

The final calculation showed that he and his collaborators embezzled more than two million four hundred thousand dans of grain.

On this account, Guo Huan was indeed recklessly audacious. He conspired with others to commit corruptions. Zhu Yuan Zhang also didn't give passes to his conspirators. Then who were Guo Huan's conspirators? After Zhu Yuan Zhang's investigation, most of the officials in the Six Ministries became Guo Huan's conspirators!

They included Zhao Mao, minister of rites, Wang Hui Di, minister of justice, Wang Zhi, deputy minister of war, and Mai Zhi De, deputy minister of works. Please note the list was

[115] Present day Beijing.

very long, according to *Annals of Criminal Law* of *The Official History of Ming*, at the time, besides the ones listed above, all the officials from deputy ministers and below in the Six Ministries were removed.

This was equivalent to saying that in all the Six Ministries, except the one minister and the two deputy ministers (excluding the ones listed above), all the officials were executed. The ministers at the time truly became commanders of one. Officials were deep down in fear. The first words they said when running into each other would be: How many died today in your ministry? In fact later the question didn't need answers because at the most the number of remained in each ministry was just three.

These were only the officials in the central government. There were also local officials, who were involved in tax collections. Crops were sent in from provinces. From there down, there were the prefectures and counties, from those down, there were the so-called rich families and grain keepers, most of whom were also executed.

The number of executed in this case exceeded thirty thousand. The result was most of the affluent and middle class families were ruined. It was just like from top and down, the whole imperial court was completely wiped clean.

In hind sight, we have to admire those who survived from the case against Guo Huan. It was truly not easy to survive, how did they manage to escape?

Questionable discoveries in the crime scene

Along with describing historical events, I'm also going to introduce some of the analysis methods used in history science and of course, I still do it my own way.

In analyzing the Guo Huan case, we use something similar to the criminal forensic method, which I believe you'll be interested in.

Now everyone please light your tobacco pipe and start to inspect the crime scene.

What listed above were the records in history documents, which is our so-called crime scene. Please note, not all history documents are trustworthy. In these documents, there are many contradictions. Just like there are many clues that may mislead your investigation in a murder crime scene.

But if you pay attention to details, truth can be uncovered.

In fact one of the most important tasks for historians is finding the truth from all these contradictory documents. Here we provide another important tool in solving cases, that is, when reading history documents, take into account of the background of the author, which for

more or less, shows the bias of the author. This is also one of the most important principles in history science. If not for self-mutilation, few authors would want to write things to castigate themselves.

Let's start the investigation based on the historical documents. This is the crime scene, are you able to find some things suspicious?

If you are still thinking, then don't read my results.

Below are my analysis, provided here only as a reference to everyone.

In my opinion, there are at least two things suspicious:

One, the amount involved in the corruption should be questionable. Why is this asked? Everyone should know that at the time the annual income of Ming was only two million four hundred thousand dans of grain. When Zhu Yuan Zhang just finished with Hu Wei Yong and also Guards in Brocade was just created, how could Guo Huan, a mere deputy minister, be so audacious and reckless that he dared to embezzle the amount that matched the annual income of the whole state?

In addition, as we have said before, the anti-corruption campaign was in full force, corrupted officials ran away at the slightest disturbance. Even in the most remote villages, if a corrupt act took place in the day, it would be reported in the evening. Guo Huan and others were under the eyes of Zhu Yuan Zhang. There were countless numbers of spies going around. The fellow dared to embezzle the crops from several provinces! After Zhu Yuan Zhang abolished the office of the prime minister, he was also dealing with many small matters. If there were a few million dans of grain not accounted for, Zhu Yuan Zhang would have already jumped up and scolded at someone. He shouldn't have to wait for some censor to report to him.

Two, if we examine the famous corruption cases in history, we can see that on the matter of embezzlement, usually the fewer people involved, the better. It meant both safer and more share from the loot. Guo Huan was merely a deputy minister of revenue and population. If he wanted to commit corruption, why did he want to conspire with those from the Ministries of Rites, Justice, War, Works, and Personnel? Was he concerned about that fewer people knew his corruption activity and wanted to advertise it? Nonetheless, Guo Huan at least got the spot light on him. As a little deputy minister, the amount of embezzlement by his conspirators broke the record kept by Prime Minister Hu Wei Yong.

Despite that, the record was not something worthy of boasting.

Overall, there were big questions that needed answers in this case. But it couldn't be taken as evidence that the case came out of thin air. Guo Huan very probably committed some

corruptive acts but the amount couldn't be this large and his so-called conspirators were not that numerous. Otherwise why didn't Zhu Yuan Zhang pick Zhang San or Li Si[116], but rather Guo Huan?

If you have made more discoveries, then congratulations, you are on your way to doing history analysis using logic and reason. History is always shrouded in cloud of suspicion. The analysis we have done here is just one of the theories and it cannot be used to construe a final conclusion on the Guo Huan case. At most, it may be considered as an inference proposition.

What's important is that if you are able to learn something by using this form of analysis, trust me, the key to disbursing the mysterious cloud shrouding the history is not far from you anymore.

The Guo Huan case finally ended. Ironically, the last man executed in this case was the chief prosecutor Wu Yong, the one who executed numerous other officials.

After a series of major cases, officials in the imperial court were all very edgy. Every day they worried if they would lose their heads. Some trouble makers poked fun at these officials. They said that if Zhu Yuan Zhang went to the Court with his jade belt tightened below his waist, then he was about to kill. If the jade belt was tied above his waist, then it indicated peace. If this was used as an indication, then it would be problematic. Just in case someday Zhu Yuan Zhang ate too much and he was bloated and had to tie his belt under the waist, and he was in a bad mood, then officials would suffer.

Per historical documents, before departing for the Court, officials held ceremonies at the door of their homes. What was the ceremony? It was about dressing well, holding his children and hugging his wife, making clear who owed them money, showing under the bed where he stashed his own private savings, and other things. Then he bade farewell and went away. His wife and children would cry on his wake. Except that the person was alive, it was no different from a funeral.

After the court session, his wife and children would wait at the door. If they saw a live person coming back, they would hold a great celebration to celebrate that he lived another day.

These were not jokes but rather the real scenes in history. Under the extremely heavy stress that no one knew if he would be dead or alive the next day, many officials couldn't endure it anymore. Many stated they wasted their dozens of years of study and would be willing just to go home farming.

I don't want to be an official anymore. Would it be ok if I go home?

Hmmm, it wasn't that easy. Some treacherous and greedy base men made slanderous

[116] In Chinese, Zhang San and Li Si refer to anonymous persons, like the use of name John Doe in English.

comments and said that it's tough to be an official in the Court. Slandering against the Court was another felony. Thus one could not leave and also could not stay. It was just like, look at you, you want to escape, but you are doomed to tumble.

The great virtue of men kind lies in being always able to come up with solutions for problems. Officials of Ming fully exhibited this virtue on this issue. They came up with a very unexpected method, feigning madness.

In the imperial court of the Martial Splendor era, a fine person suddenly became mad was a common scene. The symptoms included dementia, stolid expression, disheveled hair, calling everyone daddy, and greeting everyone with a cleaver in hand. It showed in various forms and there was only one purpose, to remain alive for couple of more years.

After all, the trick was not bad. In addition, there wasn't such technology as psychological evaluation. So if someone resolved to commit to doing even the most disgusting things, he surely would succeed.

The following is the example of a successful man, whose determination to feign madness was truly awesome.

The unfortunate (or fortunate) man was Yuan Kai, who was a supervising censor. Once, Zhu Yuan Zhang asked him to bring Crown Prince Zhu Biao a list of prisoners to be executed. This was supposed to be a simple job, but Yuan Kai didn't know his fortune changed forever because of this.

He delivered the list to the crown prince, who saw there were too many people on the list and proposed to be more lenient. The problem was the crown prince didn't go to see his dad in person. Instead he told Yuan Kai and asked him to forward his proposal to Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Well, I'd have to go, Yuan Kai thought. He saw Zhu Yuan Zhang and told him what the crown prince said in verbatim. Then he kowtowed and was ready to leave. But unexpectedly, at that moment Zhu Yuan Zhang asked: The crown prince's idea is different from mine, whom do you think is right?

I must have seen the devil. It's a matter between you father and son. I am just a minor official, how can I get involved in it? Yuan Kai was in a difficult situation. Unable to avoid the question, he came up with an answer: Your Majesty is not wrong and the crown prince is also not wrong. Your Majesty needs to execute the men to uphold the laws and the crown prince wants to release them to show mercy.

It was truly a test for Yuan Kai.

But after hearing the answer, Zhu Yuan Zhang was very angry. He excoriated Yuan Kai for being crafty and not speaking his mind. Then he expelled him out. After getting home, the

more Yuan Kai thought about the matter, the more frightened he was. He then decided to feign madness. The next day, he didn't attend the Court. He sent his servant in to note that he went mad.

As expected, Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't believe it and sent a man to his home to find out. The man who went there didn't go empty handed. He carried a carpenter drill with him. He followed Zhu Yuan Zhang's instruction that a mad man is oblivious to pains and he was there to test if he was really mad or feigning. Thus he used the drill to punch Yuan Kai.

You Kai didn't disqualify himself as a master feigner of madness. He exemplified the virtuous quality of Guan Yu, who showed no unusual emotions when his arm bone was been scraped to remove the poisons from an arrow by a surgeon. He allowed the man to drill him and didn't utter anything. The man believed he was really mad and went back to report to Zhu Yuan Zhang. Yuan Kai escaped this test.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang still didn't believe Yuan Kai was mad, so he secretly sent another man to observe him. As soon as the agent approached the courtyard of Yuan Kai's home, he was shocked by a scene and congratulated himself for not having eaten his meal (readers, please don't read the next paragraph before a meal).

Yuan Kai had iron chains on his neck and was prostrating on the ground and eating dog feces, chewing one part after another. The agent felt nauseated. Having seen this, he thought, if Yuan Kai isn't mad, then I am mad. He rushed back and reported this to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who after listening, also felt nauseated and didn't continue the inquiry on Yuan Kai.

We should all know that Yuan Kai feigned his madness. But playing eating dog feces was rather an extreme act. But Yuan Kai didn't eat the real dog shit. His colleague as the censor's office learned the information in advance and told him. He conjured up an idea. He mixed flour with some sauce and made it shaped like dog poops and ate it like a meal, which fooled the agent of Zhu Yuan Zhang.

In Zhu Yuan Zhang's era, lives of officials were tough. From the anti-corruption campaign to the case of empty seals and the case against Guo Huan, Zhu Yuan Zhang had killed many people. Some of them deserved death, while some others were executed by mistake or innocent. As such, many people dubbed Zhu Yuan Zhang as "butcher" and "homicidal maniac". Some even suspected he had mental problems. Then why did Zhu Yuan Zhang do all these things?

Previously we described much of the background of this era and enumerated the facts in Zhu Yuan Zhang's anti-corruption campaign and wrongful executions. This is in expectation to explain the relationships between Zhu Yuan Zhang and his officials in a more objective way.

It should be pointed out that although Zhu Yuan Zhang's actions were extreme, his main conduct was sound. His purpose was to root out corrupted officials. If we understand Zhu Yuan Zhang's childhood experience, we will better be able to understand his actions.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was bullied by the government since very young. For the most part, his own miseries were the result of corruption, which influenced him in his aversion to aristocrats. Although the officials worked for him, in his heart he very much distrusted them. Once the distrust was triggered by some events, it would rapidly expand and further spread in the form as loss of confidence to the entire aristocratic class.

As the aphorism says, "Once someone is bitten by a snake, for life he is afraid of strings". Zhu Yuan Zhang was a man who gotten bitten by a snake. He was bullied by officials for several dozens of years, how could he trust these people? When cases like the case of empty seals and Guo Huan's case took place, Zhu Yuan Zhang would immediately extend the scope. In his view, all officials were not trustworthy.

Although Zhu Yuan Zhang's anti-corruption efforts were admirable, the effects were not good. This was because he over-estimated the power of the criminal laws and didn't pay much attention to the betterment and improvement of the systems. He relied only on relentless prosecutions and executions. Although during his reign there was little corruption, after his death, corruptions were rampant. We'll touch on this later.

Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't pay his officials well. Many people thought he was intentionally abusing his officials. But after I analyzed the pay system at the beginning of Ming, the theory may not be correct. The pay standards created by Zhu Yuan Zhang should have been made after some careful calculations. The salaries were enough to maintain the officials' living expenses at the beginning of the Ming. But he didn't take into account the fact that in addition to feeding his own family, officials also had to take care of his clerks and some social activities. Also, because of the development of the economy, living standards became higher and the original salaries were not enough.

Some may ask, Zhu Yuan Zhang was so smart, how come he didn't expect these issues. But in reality, on these issues, Zhu Yuan Zhang was indeed short on foresight.

For example, in order for his descendants not having to suffer from hunger anymore, he decreed that all of his descendants were forbidden to work. Even if someone didn't have any job, he could only stay at home to live on allowances. Because he once was a beggar and lost his home and family, Zhu Yuan Zhang paid much attention to his relatives. He fully planned ahead for his descendants in a system of hereditary titles he established for his descendants.

Even for someone like Liu Bei[117], regardless how far distant the descendants of the Peaceful Prince of Zhongshan might be, he already reserved the titles and the allowances for them.

But what he didn't expect was that after a hundred years, his descendants proliferated to more than hundreds of thousands. Even the harvest of an entire province in the country wasn't enough to feed them. Eventually some royal family members couldn't receive food, but they also weren't allowed to work and they died of hunger at home. This is probably so-called good intentions but bad deeds.

I think this should be a fair analysis and appraisal of Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Li Shan Chang's end

At the same time when the anti-corruption campaign was in progress, another major case, the case against Hu Wei Yong was also progressing. The case didn't end just because Hu Wei Yong died, it still kept progressing. Constantly there was someone executed because someone else's confessions. When would it end?

Unexpectedly, Li Shan Chang was still alive. He was a relative of Hu Wei Yong's by marriage. In addition, it was known like a nail in wood that Li Cun Yi, his younger brother, was a co-conspirator of Hu Wei Yong's. Considering his great influence in the imperial court, Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't execute him. Even his brother Li Cun Yi was able to avoid death and was banished to the Island of Chongming (present day the Island of Chongming in Shanghai), which would be considered as a great favor from the emperor.

But Li Shan Chang understood very well that he was not about to live long. He knew Zhu Yuan Zhang very well. After all, to a certain extend he took part in the coup. Based on that man's personality, he wouldn't let him get away with it.

Zhu Yuan Zhang, come and kill me! My head is ready for you to take!

In year twenty three of Martial Splendor (AD 1390), Li Shan Chang renovated his house. He wasn't the prime minister and didn't have the power to summon others anymore. But he had to find some help. Did he have to do it himself? He thought about Tang He, the one who was in command of troops.

Tang He was his townsman and a good friend. He asked Tang He to lend three hundred soldiers as labors, which seemed to be a routine matter. But there was one thing he never expected.

[117] Liu Bei was a descendant of the first emperor of Han and the emperor of Shu Han in the Three Kingdoms period. Before he declared himself an emperor later in his life, he was born a commoner although he was a distant relative of the current emperor of Han. His most recent ancestor held the title of the Peaceful Prince of Zhongshan but the title was lost, thus he became a commoner.

Tang He sold him out.

After lending three hundred soldiers to Li Shan Chang, Tang He immediately sent a secret report to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who once again considered the execution of Li Shan Chang.

It was obvious nothing could be done by just three hundred men and also because the soldiers were sent by Tang He and weren't taking orders from Li Shan Chang. But even so, this matter already became the first straw on the back of a camel.

From this it could be seen that there had to be a reason for Tang He to live out his life in full.

The senile Li Shan Chang seemed to be bothered for having been lived for such a long time. He immediately made the second mistake.

His confidant Ding Bin was sentenced to exile for violating the laws. But Li Shan Chang petitioned in writing on Ding Bin's behalf. Zhu Yuan Zhang was irked again. Who the hell do you think you are! What I do with prisoners is none of your business. He issued order that Ding Bin would not be sent to exile but he didn't release him. Rather, he was sent to prison and tortured day and night. Zhu Yuan Zhang was convinced that Li Shan Chang was hiding something and Ding Bin knew the secret. Reality proved that his suspicion was well founded.

Li Shan Chang did his part for Ding Bin. But Ding Bin didn't do his part for Li Shan Chang.

He confessed in detail the plot for a coup between Li Cun Yi and Hu Wei Yong. Zhu Yuan Zhang immediately made the decision to arrest and get Li Cun Yi back. Under torture, Li Cun Yi confessed how he persuaded Li Shan Chang. And the words "you guys take care of yourself" became one of the most frequently uttered phrases from Zhu Yuan Zhang's mouth.

The camel was about to fall down. Another bundle of straw was needed. For now, straws were not hard to find.

After some detailed analysis, Li Shan Chang's house servants thought the time had come. It would cost nothing to beat a battered dog and it would be worth something to beat a battered dog. They conspired as victims to petition to Zhu Yuan Zhang that for a long time they had been abused by Li Shan Chang. They also reported that Li Shan Chang actively took part in Hu Wei Yong's plot for a coup. They explicitly provided the times and places of the meetings, although in their capacity they wouldn't be able to know those things so well. But at the time, these were not important.

Now more and more people jumped on the bandwagon. The censorial officials submitted petitions to censure Li Shan Chang. All kinds of charges were raised, from violations of decorum in imperial court sessions to corruption. It seemed he ought to also be charged with chopping down woods and destroying the environment during his house renovation. More

unexpectedly, even an agency that had whatsoever absolutely nothing to do with criminal justice also came out and stomped on Li Shan Chang's body. It was truly ridiculous.

The agency was the Office of Astronomy, which was mainly responsible for astronomy and making calendars. Regardless how one might get involved, it would be unimaginable that someone observing the sky would also be able to take part in it. But they indeed achieved it. There is nothing unachievable in the world, as long as there are ones determined to do it.

They submitted a report to Zhu Yuan Zhang. In it, they said recently there were changes in the sky and it was an ominous sign. Then they proposed their solution. It's time to remove a senior official.

If someone needs something, something would be provided. One has to submit to the human nature.

Li Shan Chang was approaching the end of his life. Not mentioning the Iron Certificate, even a diamond certificate wouldn't be enough to save his life.

I have followed you for dozens of years, now we're at the end. I won't be able to follow you anymore, you finish the rest yourself.

From all aspects, there was no reason for Li Shan Chang to rebel. His son married a princess. He himself was not only Zhu Yuan Zhang's relative by marriage, he was also the most prominent official. Even if Hu Wei Yong succeeded with his coup, at most he would still be the most prominent official. Why did he need to overthrow Zhu Yuan Zhang?

Of course Zhu Yuan Zhang knew there was no reason for Li Shan Chang to plot a coup, but it was necessary for him to execute Li Shan Chang.

Considering that Li Shan Change had followed him for years, Zhu Yuan Zhang saw him for the last time before the execution.

Zhu Yuan Zhang sat in the throne, looking at Li Shan Chang below, who was on his knees.

The man was once my most trusted lieutenant, now I'm going to kill him.

Li Shan Chang, on his knees, raised his head and looked at Zhu Yuan Zhang.

This man was once my most sincere friend, now he is going to kill me.

What else was there to say, nothing was needed.

Li Shang Chang was looking at Zhu Yuan Zhang. Dozens of years ago, he went to join this man. They talked night after night. They felt it seemed too late to have seen each other. Together they planned for their grand future. That year, Li Shang Chang was forty and Zhu Yuan Zhang was twenty six.

He kowtowed and thanked for his generosity to the now emperor Zhu Yuan Zhang and

walked out of the hall.

Li Shan Chang went to the execution ground. He looked at the sky for the last time.

It's such a good weather today, the sky is so blue.

All of a sudden he realized that thirty six years ago, when he walked into Zhu Yuan Zhang's camp, it seemed to be also a fine clear day.

In year twenty three of Martial Splendor (AD 1390), Zhu Yuan Zhang executed Li Shan Chang and his immediate family.

Chapter Twenty

Lan Yu, the Last Celebrity General

The death of Li Shan Chang finally drew a small period mark to the Hu Wei Yong case that had lasted for ten years. Officials finally were able to exhale with some relief.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't let himself down. He seemed to be a man with inexhaustible energy. In the same time that he was dealing with Hu Wei Yong and Li Shan Chang, he also scored victories in another battlefield.

The loser in this battlefield was Northern Yuan, which had escaped to the desert. Although in the war since the beginning of Ming the strength of Northern Yuan had been greatly reduced, they still had enough forces to keep raiding the borders of Ming.

Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't slacken the fight against Northern Yuan despite its reduced strength. He always thought the Mongol cavalry was the biggest threat to Ming. Frankly speaking, on military matters, you have to respect Zhu Yuan Zhang's far sightedness. His prophecy unfortunately was realized dozens of years later.

Zhu Yuan Zhang amassed forces and launched two expeditions in February of year thirteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1380) and January of year fourteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1381).

Both expeditions were victorious but didn't result in a fatal blow to Northern Yuan, which also realized that it was impossible to achieve victory against the powerful Ming by frontal fights. They dissolved into small units and adopted guerrilla tactics to harass Ming at the borders.

The current ruler of Northern Yuan was Achishilidala, the son of the Obedient Emperor of Yuan and the one who escaped from a chaotic battle. He succeeded as the emperor of Northern Yuan. He adopted a policy of direct confrontations against Ming. In fact it was understandable for him to adopt such a policy. After all, his father, who was an emperor in the Great Capital, was forced to move and most of his relatives were captured and imprisoned by Ming. The hatred was irreconcilable.

But the more important reason was he also needed to feed himself. When trade was not established, if a nomad people wanted to acquire the produces from the Central Plains, there was only one method, looting. And the method didn't cost much effort. There were some losses but the gains were also significant. In terms of economics, it was high reward and low risk. Of course this kind of business would have to be done often.

Zhu Yuan Zhang clearly recognized this. He knew to completely eradicate the threats from Northern Yuan, he must make Achishilidala pay so dearly with all he had that he would never be able to recover.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang also had a difficult problem, that those celebrity generals of early Ming had almost all died off. Of course, many had been executed by him. Among the ones who were the ablest in fighting, Chang Yu Chun died early, Li Wen Zhong was deprived of power and banished by him, and although Feng Sheng and Deng Yu were still alive, both were very old. The top celebrity general Xu Da was also dead in year seventeen of Martial Splendor (AD 1384). He died of illness, which would be considered a satisfactory end.

It should be noted that according to many books, after Xu Da fell ill, his diet didn't allow him to eat steamed geese. But Zhu Yuan Zhang intentionally vouchsafed a steamed goose and Xu Da died in anguish. Allegations like this are not credible.

Xu Da was not only Zhu Yuan Zhang's top general, he also saved Zhu Yuan Zhang's life in Hezhou. Zhu Yuan Zhang had nothing to gain by executing him. In addition, he kept a low profile and never flaunted. Assuming something worse, even if Zhu Yuan Zhang had the intention to kill Xu Da, he didn't have to use such a stupid method. He could easily have asked someone to prescribe some poisonous medicine and send couple of guards in brocade to get everything done. He didn't have to trouble himself by using so ostentatious a method like vouchsafing a steamed goose to eliminate Xu Da.

Xu Da was one of Ming's best generals. He was born a commoner but became a military genius of a generation. He worked his way up from a foot soldier, followed Zhu Yuan Zhang in deadly combats, and in brutal wars grew into the best general in late Yuan and early Ming. He was adept at commanding large armies, a virtuoso in strategies and tactics. He was generous to others. He fought dozens of battles, won every one when he decided to fight, and took every site when he wanted to attack. Even more, his fights against the top celebrity general Wang Bao Bao of Northern Yuan were the pinnacle of his military career.

He showed us that, by striving for excellence, an average man could become a celebrity earth shaking general.

And his glorious military achievements and legendary life also showed everyone that:

I, Xu Da, deserve to be the best of the best among generals!

The Xu Da era ended and an era for new celebrity generals arrived.

The era belonged to another man. This man was Lan Yu.

Lan Yu was a native of Dingyuan in Anhui province. He was the younger brother of Chang Yu Chun's wife. Chang Yu Chun was aloof to others but had a very high regard to this relative of his. He recommended him to Zhu Yuan Zhang for a few times. But not until Lan Yu followed Xu Da's expedition in year five of Martial Splendor and excelled among others, did Zhu Yuan Zhang take Chang Yu Chun's words seriously and assign him important tasks.

Although it was said those were important tasks, they were really not. Lan Yu wasn't lucky. In those years of his, there were too many famous generals. Comparing to those men, he was far inferior to them in both seniority and capabilities. All he did was obediently work as assistants to those senior men.

In year twenty of Martial Splendor (AD 1381), Zhu Yuan Zhang once again ordered an expedition. At the time, taking part in the military actions in expedition into the desert (in Ming, expedition against Northern Yuan was called expedition into the desert) was an honor to every general. But Lan Yu played only secondary roles in the past several expeditions into the desert. But even his secondary role was not played well. In the show in year five of Martial Splendor, he ran back with Wang Bao Bao chasing him at his tail.

To a soldier, this was really a disgrace.

What was the most glorious achievement of a soldier? It was not how many cities he took or how many enemies he killed, it was also not how many goats and cattle he captured.

To a professional soldier, the most glorious achievement was find the one who defeated him previously and then completely vanquish him!

Lan Yu could never forget the war in year five of Martial Splendor. Wang Bao Bao's forces suddenly appeared and took him completely off guard. He was routed without even seeing how Wang Bao Bao looked like. Although the defeat wasn't his responsibility, he understood that, to earn his honor, the best way would be to fight Wang Bao Bao again and completely defeat him. Then he would stand in front of him and proudly tell him: I am Lan Yu, the one who was defeated by you before. Now, you are my prisoner!

Since then, Lan Yu had worked hard studying the tactics of troop deployments. He kept learning from experiences and reading military books. The only thing on his mind was fight Wang Bao Bao again. But his hope vanished. In year eight of Martial Splendor (AD 1375), Wang Bao Bao died in the northern desert.

For a moment Lan Yu lost his target. But very soon he found his new aim, destroying

Northern Yuan completely!

Although he was full of ambitions and petitioned many times for a command in an expedition into the desert, there were still several senior men hanging in there and it wasn't his turn. Several times he assisted Fu You De in expeditions to Yunnan and Dali and earned great achievements. He was also conferred the title of Marquis of Yongchang. Although everyone recognized his military talent, in their eyes, Lan Yu was still Lan Yu and it was impossible for him to exceed celebrity generals like Xu Da, Chang Yu Chun and Li Wen Zhong.

Lan Yu was an ambitious man, who would never admit he was inferior to anyone. But he also understood that to earn people's recognition, he had to do something his predecessors, such as Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun, couldn't do, which was, destroying Northern Yuan.

Thus the expedition in year twenty of Martial Splendor (AD 1387) undoubtedly provided the best opportunity for Lan Yu. Zhu Yuan Zhang gave in to Lan Yu's appeal and conferred him the position of right deputy commander.

By the name of right deputy commander, it should be known that Lan Yu this time was second in command again. But he really didn't have any reason to vie for a higher position because the commander-in-chief was Feng Sheng.

Lan Yu was not satisfied. Grumbling, he set out. He knew it wasn't his turn yet.

But, opportunity was something that was always there. Lan Yu's years of hard work would yield fruits in this expedition, although they manifested in ways no one expected.

The target of this expedition was Nayacu, Yuan's minister of defense, who occupied a vast region north of the Songhua River. Nayacu was also an excellent general. After Wang Bao Bao's death, he commanded two hundred thousand troops and occupied large areas of Eastern Liao and posted serious threats to Ming along its boarders.

For a long time Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to remove the thorny nail. Only with Nayacu removed, could Northern Yuan be attacked without much worry.

As usual, major military campaigns were all directed personally by Zhu Yuan Zhang himself. Based on the current situation, he instructed Feng Sheng as follow:

Your army should first occupy Tongzhou (present day Tong County, a district of Beijing). But do not hurry into action. Send men to reconnoiter for information about Yuan troops. If enemy is found in Qingzhou (present day Bairin Left Banner in Inner Monglolia), then attack should commence immediately but the main part of the army should not be sent in to the battle. Rather cavalry should be sent to launch a sudden attack. Only after the vanguard troops take Qingzhou, should the main force commence its advance. By doing this, victory will be guaranteed.

Zhu Yuan Zhang paused and then emphasized: But before Qingzhou is taken, you must not commit the main force to the battle. If you do, you'll be defeated.

What Zhu Yuan Zhang said sounded like divination. Even before the battle began, he already predicted the entire progression of the war. Even the best generals like Feng Sheng and Lan Yu didn't venture to fully believe what Zhu Yuan Zhang said.

In many military decisions of Ming, Zhu Yuan Zhang was in the minority, but the truth was usually on his side. This time it was no exception.

At the same time when the expedition was being planned, Zhu Yuan Zhang also secretly made another plan. Realities later proved that the successful execution of the plan completely destroyed Nayacu's two hundred thousand troops.

Zhu Yuan Zhang, a really extraordinary man!

An attack in a snowy night

On January 2, Zhu Yuan Zhang named Feng Sheng, the Duke of Song, the senior general for campaigning against barbarians, Fu You De, the Duke of Ying and, Lan Yu, the Marquis of Yongchang the left and right deputy generals, in an expedition to Eastern Liao with a force of two hundred thousand troops.

On February 3, Feng Sheng and his troops arrived in Tongzhou. He heeded Zhu Yuan Zhang's advice and didn't send out troops. Rather he sent men to Qingzhou to gather information. He was surprised that Nayacu indeed deployed a large force to guard Qingzhou.

There was no reason to hesitate on the next move. Feng Sheng sent his cavalry vanguard to attack Qingzhou. The position of commanding the vanguard troops was naturally seized up by Lan Yu.

Lan Yu finally got his opportunity. He looked at the cavalrymen behind him. There were not many of them and this action might also be very dangerous, but excitement filled his heart.

The day I've been waiting for is finally here, my time has come!

Lan Yu looked at his men, who were all carefully chosen by him. They were all about to go out to acquire more glories.

It was snowing heavily. Everything was covered by the white snow. The sky and the earth blended into a hazy mist. There seemed to be no boundaries between mountains and rivers and the earth. The troops were about to depart in this kind of environment and advance into the unknown ahead of them.

Before departing, Lan Yu told his men: We are going there. We must win this fight.

Everyone must do his best to kill the enemy! Tang's famous general Li Su took Caizhou in the snow, swept the rebel towns in one stroke, and earned everlasting fame. Today it's snowing again, isn't this the will of the Heaven! I ask everyone to dedicate yourself to the country, fight to the end, earn your merit, and let history remember your name!

With that, he jumped on his horse and set out for Qingzhou.

The column thus commenced its march in the white snowy blizzard. In the bitter cold everything seemed devoid of its life. Amid the silence, only the trotting noise of the horses could be heard. The noise came suddenly and then gradually faded away. The horse tracks were quickly covered by the snow, as though no one had ever passed.

Lan Yu had been with Chang Yu Chun for many years. Although ostensibly they were relatives, they were really like teacher and student. He learned the essence of Chang Yu Chun's tactics and his style of fighting was also similar to that of Chang Yu Chun's. It was always in the form of a sudden raid that would awe and shock the enemy. Usually the enemy was already routed before they had time to react.

If under the ground Chang Yu Chun knew he had such a student, he would be very glad.

In the battle of Qingzhou, Lan Yu fully utilized this style of attack. He marched overnight without pause. When he arrived at Qingzhou, the enemy was completely unprepared. The city gates were wide open and they were cooking their breakfast. When they saw the ghost-like men covered in white snow rushing toward them, they were completely horrified.

Lan Yu didn't have to fight very hard to annihilate the enemy. Golai, the governor of Northern Yuan, was killed and Qingzhou was taken along with a large number of prisoners.

He didn't allow the victory to overwhelm himself because he knew the next action was really the most important.

In Tongzhou Feng Sheng got the good news from Lan Yu. He recognized that the time for a decisive battle had come.

On March 1, Feng Sheng led his forces through the Pine Pavilion Gap and arrived in Daning (present day Ning City in Inner Mongolia). Feng Sheng was very careful. He would not move his forces carelessly. After being fully clear about the enemy's situation, he finally made his decision.

On May 22, Feng Sheng left fifty thousand troops guarding Daning and took his main force toward the Liao River. A minor victory opened the way to Eastern Liao. Nayacu was just ahead!

Just when Feng Sheng united with Lan Yu and was preparing to launch a decisive battle against Nayacu, an unexpected piece of news disrupted their plan.

Unlike before, this was good news.

> *Thus winning one hundred times out of one hundred battles is not the best possible outcome. Subduing the enemy without a fight is the best of the best outcome. - from The Art of War by Sun Tzu.*

At the same time when Zhu Yuan Zhang sent Feng Sheng out for the expedition, he also summoned another man and assigned him a mission. The name of the man was Naciwul, who was originally Nayacu's subordinate. His mission was to persuade Nayacu to surrender.

On military matters, Zhu Yuan Zhang was never a reckless man. He very clearly understood that it was easy to defeat Northern Yuan, but it was very hard to eradicate the threat from Northern Yuan. Thus in parallel to the military expedition, he also used another weapon to attack Northern Yuan.

The weapon was more effective than any spears and knives or cannon and blunderbusses, its name was money.

Zhu Yuan Zhang objectively analyzed the situation. He recognized that it was very difficult to destroy Northern Yuan by force only. He had to adopt a more effective method. After many confrontations with Northern Yuan, Zhu Yuan Zhang found the method.

Northern Yuan was a regime of nomad peoples. Its economic strength was no match against Ming. They relied only on their tradition of excellence in fighting. If so, it would make sense to use one's strength to the opponent's weakness. Soldiers of Northern Yuan were good at fighting, thus Zhu Yuan Zhang spent a lot of money to lure Mongols to move south and distributed lands to Mongol nobles. The strategy was very effective. After all, no one was willing to eat sand in the desert every day. It was definitely better in the Central Kingdom. There was better food, as well as entertainment.

The strategy of pulling the rug under one's feet was very potent. Many Mongols moved to the Central Plains and the population of Northern Yuan gradually declined.

At the same time, Zhu Yuan Zhang adopted a more tolerant policy on race. He treated all races fairly and prohibited racial discrimination. Even before Xu Da started attacking the Great Capital, he issued strict orders that prohibited Xu Da from killing Mongols. There was also no policy to purge the Mongol royals and nobles. Not only that, soldiers were sent to guard the palaces and killings were strictly prohibited. On the day that Xu Da took the Great Capital, the daily lives of the residents in the city were not disturbed and shops were open for business.

Under the accommodating policy, even at the beginning of Ming, there were many Mongols taking important positions in the government. For example, the previously mentioned Dao Tong was a Mongol. The policy also became the basis for him to deal with other racial issues.

Just when Feng Sheng was preparing to attack Nayacu, Naciwul also arrived in Songhua River and urged Nayacu to surrender. Nayacu was receptive, but he also felt he'd lose his face if he ordered surrender with so many men under him and without a fight. He hesitated. He said he was to surrender and then recanted. After he acted this way for a few times, both Feng Sheng and Lan Yu felt the guy was someone who couldn't be convinced without seeing some blood. They issued an ultimatum to Nayacu and moved the camps to the gates of Nayacu's city.

Nayacu made an assessment of his strength. He knew himself well. His opponents were Feng Sheng and Lan Yu and they had elite and powerful troops. It would mean only death if he chose to fight.

Alas, Heaven won't allow me to keep my men! After this lament, Nayacu took his two hundred thousand troops and surrendered to the Ming army.

All surrenders must be performed in a ceremony and this one was no exception.

After all, Nayacu surrendered with two hundred thousand men under him, which was quite a bit of capital. To show his respect, Lan Yu prepared to invite him to a banquet, which should be a cordial event. After the meals and drinks, the contract would be signed on the dining table. Wouldn't it be a beautiful thing?

But an unexpected incident occurred in the banquet.

Trouble implanted

Nayacu led a retinue of several hundred to the surrender ceremony (it ought to be fair to say that it didn't seem to need so many people to just surrender). Lan Yu welcomed him warmly and led him into the tent personally and held a banquet to welcome him. Lan Yu was also careful not to embarrass his guest by avoiding using the word surrender. Both sides were amicable to each other.

While everything was going well, an act by Lan Yu completely ruined the harmonious atmosphere.

When Nayacu was raising a toast in Lan Yu's honor, he probably also said something like it would be inadequate to show brotherly respect if the toast was not drank. Lan Yu, seeing that Nayacu was wearing a shabby outfit, took off his own coat and asked Nayacu to put it on.

This should be considered a friendly gesture. But Nayacu declined. Why? It was Lan Yu's ignorance. He didn't take into the consideration that he and Nayacu were not of the same race. The customs of attiring were different. Although Lan Yu's motive was good, to Nayacu, this was taken as a form of condescension vouchsafed from a victor to a loser.

Lan Yu thought Nayacu was declining out of politeness and thus repeatedly insisted Nayacu to put the coat on. He also indicated that if Nayacu didn't put on the coat, he wouldn't drink the toast. But following the same line, Nayacu also indicated that if Lan Yu didn't drink the toast, he wouldn't put on the coat.

Both were military men and didn't know how to play like a civilian official. Both had strong wills and wouldn't yield.

Thus a very simple matter became a logical paradox about if it was an egg that gave birth to a chicken or a chicken gave birth to an egg. Lan Yu said: If you don't put on the coat I won't drink the toast. Nayacu said: If you don't drink I won't put on the coat.

As they tussled, tempers flared. Nayacu was more direct and straightforward. He snapped first and spilled the toast offered by Lan Yu on the ground. He was very rude. But Nayacu didn't expect that there was someone even ruder than him.

The ruder man was not Lan Yu. The man also appeared previously in this book. But because his ability was limited, thus he didn't have the opportunity to show himself. He was Chang Mao, a son of Chang Yu Chun's.

Chang Mao inherited Chang Yu Chun's title and temper, but not his military talent. He followed Lan Yu all over the places. Now seeing that Lan Yu was humiliated, he was infuriated. Without a word, he drew out his knife and thrashed it to Nayacu. It's just like now, in a drinking party, when someone can be ticked off by a word from another and will start a fight. Nayacu, being through numerous combats, reacted quickly and evaded injuring the fatal parts. But he was still hit on the shoulder.

The situation suddenly deteriorated, soldiers on both sides outside of the tent heard the noise and all came around for the melee. If the situation was allowed to be developed by itself, Nayacu would certainly not survive but his two hundred thousand men also would not surrender anymore. At this critical moment, Geng Zhong, a military governor, kept his cool. He immediately ordered the soldiers at his side to help escorting Nayacu out and went to see Feng Sheng, the commander-in-chief .

Feng Sheng was a mild tempered and cautious person. When he saw the battered and wounded Nayacu, who shouted in Mongolian that he didn't understand, he realized for the most part what had happened. He at once said conciliatory words to soothe Nayacu, which calmed down Nayacu's emotion. Now Nayacu's troops also heard the news and thought Nayacu was already killed. They all vowed revenge. Feng Sheng immediately sent Nayacu's general Guan Tong, who already surrendered, to explain the matter. Then the surrender finally was completed without a snag.

From this incident, Lan Yu showed his a flaw in his personality. He wasn't able to think through on issues and he was too vehemently stubborn. The matter was really a simple one. He should have just simply drunk the toast offered and thus kept his counterpart from being insulted. The matter would have been resolved successfully. This flaw also foreshadowed the tragedies later in his life.

The expedition in year twenty[118] of Martial Splendor (AD 1387) thus successfully ended. Nayacu had to surrender. The Ming army took two hundred thousand Northern Yuan troops prisoner along with large quantities of supplies. Finally Yuan's influence in eastern Liao was eliminated.

Unexpectedly, after his return, Commander-in-Chief Feng Sheng was charged and arrested by Zhu Yuan Zhang. In this ironical way, Lan Yu got the position of commander-in-chief, for which he had been dreaming for over ten years. For countless number of times he imaged the glory when he obtained the position of commander-in-chief, but he never thought that it would come in this scenario.

Of course he couldn't imagine that his end would be even worse than Feng Sheng's. Nonetheless, these would happen later. At least for now, Lan Yu got his dream realized and he was about to gain more glory as a commander-in-chief.

The opportunity came very soon.

Ever since year twenty seven of Utmost Justice (AD 1367) when Zhu Yuan Zhang and Yuan were at a full scale war, both sides fought each other without respite. Although Zhu Yuan Zhang expelled the Yuan rulers out of the Central Plains, the threats from the steppes of Mongolia never ceased. To get rid of the old nemesis, Zhu Yuan Zhang employed all kinds of methods. There were some results but the stubborn enemy was never completely uprooted.

He couldn't afford to wait without an end. Northern Yuan must be destroyed in his hands!

Only so, could he leave this world and the empire he founded with his mind at peace.

The expedition in year twenty of Martial Splendor destroyed forces of Northern Yuan in Eastern Liao, which eliminated Zhu Yuan Zhang's worry at his back. His acumen into military matters told him that the moment for the final decisive battle was about to come.

He had waited for twenty years. In twenty years, numerous soldiers mounted their horses and went out on expeditions and didn't come back. In remote fortifications and deserts, there were bodies of dead soldiers everywhere. Countless number of families lost their fathers, husbands, and sons. To remove the threat from Northern Yuan, they had paid dearly.

[118] The original text says year twenty three but this should be year twenty, as shown in the text below.

No more wait, let's get everything done in one battle!

The final battle

Historical events were usually unexpected. The honors belonged to Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun twenty years ago when the Great Capital was reclaimed and the Yuan Dynasty was put to death. Now twenty years later, the task to destroy Northern Yuan was assigned to Lan Yu, who had never been a commander-in-chief before.

When Lan Yu received the commander-in-chief's seal from Zhu Yuan Zhang, he felt an uncontrollable excitement. His effort of so many years was not wasted after all. Heaven awarded him more than he had asked.

I am finally about to start my own grand career. I will be like those legendary celebrity generals, my name will last in history and I will be admired by millions!

Zhu Yuan Zhang looked at the man that was not so young anymore. This is such a marvelous time! So many great generals have been my subordinates. They led the armies to all over the world and accomplished great everlasting deeds.

Xu Da, Chang Yu Cun, and Li Wen Zhong, they were all so talented. But they are all gone now. I am old. I cannot go on expeditions anymore.

Lan Yu, I believe in your ability. You will be able to fulfill their wishes and finish the work they left!

On military matters, Zhu Yuan Zhang almost was never wrong and this time was no exception.

In March of year twenty one of Martial Splendor (AD 1388), Zhu Yuan Zhang gave an army of one hundred fifty thousand to Lan Yu. The troop strength was the same as the one in the expedition in year five of Martial Splendor. But the difference was this time there was only one line of advance and the only commander was Lan Yu.

Lan Yu would command an army of one hundred fifty thousand to fight the final decisive battle.

Zhu Yuan Zhang personally went to send Lan Yu off. He told him: Advance at full speed. Go directly to the barbarian's home. This is the mission to clear out the desert once for all.

Lan Yu, I'm assigning this mission to you. I trust that you won't let me down!

The emperor of Northern Yuan now was no longer Achishilidala, who died in year eleven of Martial Splendor (AD 1378). His son Togus Temur succeeded the throne of Northern Yuan as emperor. The title of the reign year was Heavenly Beginning.

Per historical records, this Togus Temur was very likely Maderibachi, who was taken prisoner by Li Wen Zhong in Yingchang in year three of Martial Splendor (AD 1370). After securing an oath that he would never do anything against Ming, in a show of mercy and leniency, the Ming government sent him back to Northern Yuan in year seven of Martial Splendor (AD 1374). But reality proved this was a man who didn't keep his promise. After he acceded to the throne, he kept harassing at the Ming borders and instigating wars to continue the confrontation with Ming, which had been going on for ten years.

To this bellicose successor, Zhu Yuan Zhang already showed enough sincerity by sending ambassadors to reconcile for peace. But those efforts never bore results. His stubbornness finally wore out Ming government's patience. If so, then let us resolve everything with knives and swords.

Lan Yu's army marched out from Daning and fought and advanced forward. After arriving at Qingzhou, Lan Yu received intelligence reports that Togus Temur was in the Fishing Sea (present day Lake Baikal). Lan Yu immediately decided to take the army to the target.

This was an arduous road, not only was the target very far, but also there was the desolate desert on the way. It was also hard to secure supplies. If they got lost in the desert, the result would be unimaginable and the moral of the troops would be shaken.

But Lan Yu was confident. In fact, as shown later, he had the best and most powerful army of the time. It was the outstanding quality of the army that ensured the victory of the war.

Then what kind of quality of an army would deserve to be called the best and most powerful army?

A strong army

This is an issue worthy of discussion. Being victorious in a war is the result of efforts by generals and soldiers. In my opinion, whether or not an army is strong can be seen from its behavior, which can be categorized into four classes.

An army of the fourth class is an army of motley crowd. There is no discipline and it commits looting and pillaging. When attacked by a well-organized force, this kind of army will immediately disintegrate. It is absolutely not a strong army.

An army of the third class has a complete organizational hierarchy. It exhibits good order and marches in sync. But its moral is not high. It may be better than the fourth class. But when it is facing a more powerful enemy, it will be defeated. It is also not a strong army.

An army of second class has not only a unified command structure, but also is well-equipped and with high moral. Shouts like "kill enemies, serve our country" can usually be

heard in a march. Soldiers are all eager to show their bravery. An army of this class has the fortitude and momentum. Its troops are not afraid of any enemy. It can be said as a strong army. But regretfully, it is not the strongest. Comparing to the strongest army, it still lacks a kind of quality.

This quality is silence. The strongest army is a silent army.

This kind of silence is not an indication that the men in the army are all dumb or reticent.

The so-called silence should be a scene like this:

The commander stands atop at a height to speak to his one hundred fifty thousand troops, which covers mountains and hills, valleys and plains.

They are different in looks and of different races, from different places, and have different customs. But they cram into one place, listen to the same voice, look in the same direction, and remain silent.

This is the true meaning of silence. This is the most important quality of an army.

The army led by Lan Yu was such an army. They climbed mountains, crossed rivers, and entered the desert. In this land of desolation, there were only the goading sun light and the sand storms that filled the sky. They couldn't have the supplies keeping up with them, so the soldiers had to carry the clunky provisions and equipment themselves. Men kept falling down, but the remainder kept marching forward.

The soldiers were hungry, thirsty, and tired. But they kept stepping forward and couldn't be stopped. This was a tenacious army. What kept them up was the belief and the goal, to completely destroy the enemy.

An agonizing choice

Lan Yu looked at his troops and was proud for having them. But he also knew the key to winning this war was not about deploying the troops, it was about finding the enemy.

Obviously, Northern Yuan already knew the plan of the Ming army. They stayed in hiding, which was not like the kind of hide-n-seek played by children. It was the vast desert, there was no spy satellite. How could they be found?

The troops had marched for a long time. Now both food and water was running short. Although the moral was high, how long could they sustain?

He summoned Wang Bi, the brigadier he trusted the most, and asked him: What is our present location?

Wang Bi replied: This place is called Hundred Wells and it's about forty lis from the

Fishing Sea.

Hundred Wells? The name of the place even has the word well in it? This is already very near the Fishing Sea. But not only there is no enemy, there isn't even water.

Could the intelligence be wrong? Could the enemy have moved? That's very possible. But where have they gone?

Just when Lan Yu was thinking hard, Brigadier Guo Ying reported that both food and water was about to run out. Lan Yu understood it was time for a decision.

In war movies, at this moment, there is usually the scene like this: A soldier, full of anger showing on his face, shouts to the commanding officer (usually a lieutenant or a captain), "captain, give the order to fight!

Another soldier runs up and shouts: order! captain!

Everyone in unison: captain, give your order!

Now the camera moves to focus on the captain's face, which shows a stoic expression. Then he walks a few rounds in the room and finally says in a calm tune: comrades, it's not the time yet!

The progression of the story will tell us that the captain is always right.

This is not a joke. Lan Yu at the time was facing the captain's choice.

We have said previously. Usually whenever there is important military decision to be taken, there are always some people twittering around you. This one says to go forward and the other one says to retreat. This one says to go east, and the other one says to go west. Regardless, if someone proves to be right, he gets the credit. If one is wrong, then he doesn't bear responsibilities. Everyone is willing to take the easy credit. But the commander-in-chief is the most pitiful man because he is the final decision maker and the one that bears the responsibility.

The responsibility is not just about paying some fine or issuing an apology. If the judgment is wrong, the price will be the lives of tens of thousands of troops!

Lan Yu finally understood the disappointment and depression Xu Da showed in those years after he was defeated. He now was in such a misery. Where to go?

After some contemplation, Lan Yu decided to have a conference of his generals and listen to their opinions.

Just as expected, some of the generals suggested withdrawing and some suggested going forward. Among them the ones that suggested withdrawing were the majority. But Wang Bi adamantly advocated advancing (we are now deep in the desert and we've done nothing so

far. If we go back now, how are we going to explain this mission?). But his opinion was quickly submerged in a deluge of opposite opinions.

Lan Yu finally saw it was useless to confer with these generals. He had to make his own decision.

Go back just like this? Then my efforts of dozens of years will be totally wasted. I have waited for such a long time. Am I going to fail at the most critical moment? No, I won't give up!

Then continue the advance? But where is the enemy? Food and water are running short. The troops can't sustain for a few more days. Tens of thousands of men probably will die of hunger and thirst. If that happens, I can only ride alone back over the corpses of the bodies of numerous soldiers. How am I going to face the emperor?

Forward or backward, this was the question.

No one spoke now. They understood now it was the critical moment.

Soldiers looked at their generals and the generals looked at Lan Yu, who looked at the sky.

The final decision

Would it be so great if Heaven could make the decision for me? It's easy to make a decision. But if my decision is wrong, would Heaven give me another chance?

Lan Yu, you have to understand that in this game, the cruelest part is you've got only one chance. It's just like in an auction house, when the gavel falls down, it's all over. You have to buy it if it's cheap and you have to buy it if it's expensive.

In such a situation, military books are useless. No one will be able to tell me where the enemy is. To make a decision, what else can I rely on?

Intuition? Yes, intuition! Here is yellow sand all over, everywhere is desolation. Here is no man's land. But I can sense that the enemy is nearby!

But can intuition be relied on? There is no intelligence, no clue, and no trace of anything. Will I make such an important decision based purely on intuition?

To make today's decision, I have quietly struggled for many years.

Yes, I must believe in myself. I must believe in the experience that I have accumulated over the countless number of combats. I must believe in the toils in studying the military books that I have read under the forlorn lights in late nights for so many times.

No rational, no clue, no evidence, but the enemy must be nearby!

Forward! This is my decision! My decision is correct. My decision must be correct!

He made his decision and calmly told his generals, who had been waiting: Forward, the enemy is nearby.

No one questioned, for they saw confidence on Lan Yu's face. The confidence also affected them and the entire army.

Thus, the army of one hundred fifty thousand marched off. The soldiers took one more step toward the unknown. But the army in the desert didn't hesitate and wasn't shaken. Because they believed that regardless of any difficulty, Lan Yu would find the ways. The man would lead them to victory and return home alive.

Winners are the ones who work together at all ranks!

Lan Yu led his troops continuing into the desert. On the way they were very careful. Even for cooking, they would dig a hole on the ground and cook meals in the hole to prevent the smoke from coming out and be discovered by the enemy. This was truly a dreadful army. Even in the desolate desert they took care of such details. The army was like a desert scorpion, which crawled forward silently and hid in shadows. Only when it saw the enemy, did it launch that lethal strike.

When the army reached the southern tip of the Fishing Sea, Lan Yu finally found traces of the Northern Yuan army. But he couldn't figure out how many men and the rank of the commander. Nonetheless, this was the best opportunity. He immediately ordered Wang Bi as the vanguard to advance toward northeast of the Fishing Sea. The Northern Yuan army must be completely destroyed.

Now, at the northeast end of the Fishing Sea, Togus Temur, the supreme ruler of Northern Yuan was holding a banquet with his senior officials. He was not a fool, as soon as Lan Yu's army departed, he got the news. He knew very well that at other times, in small skirmishes that needed only guerilla tactics, the enemy would not be able to do much. But this time Zhu Yuan Zhang was serious, thus he moved his main forces and nobles of all ranks to here.

Here was a place that had no permanent residents. In the vast desert, Lan Yu's army would have no supply and support. More importantly the horses wouldn't have water and feed. Lan Yu knew very well about military strategies and he wouldn't risk going deep into the desert. All he had to do was wait for Lan Yu's supply to run out. When enemy's water and food was used up, he would launch a counterattack.

In times of waiting, he was indeed sometimes uneasy. What if Lan Yu really comes? But after many days, there wasn't even a shadow of the enemy. Gradually he let his guard down. He didn't even post the necessary sentries. He drank and entertained with his officials every

day. By the way, in this time to stay away from trouble, he also took his wife and son with him. The purpose was to ensure their safety. But what happened later was exactly the opposite of what he hoped.

Just when Wang Bi was advancing toward his main camp, he was sitting in his tent. On this day, it was windy and gales blew up the sand. The air was filled with yellow sand and the visibility was only dozens of meters. The day was as dark as night. Usually, in this kind of weather, it was impossible for the Ming army to launch an attack. He should feel more secure. But the sandy and dusty air seemed to be blowing onto his heart. An ominous feeling crept into his heart.

The Mongolians that were brave and excellent fighters on desert and steppes had a natural ability to sense danger. This ability was formed from the habit of the permanent nomad life style. But Togus Temur couldn't tell what was wrong. A premonition was just a premonition.

Well, keep drinking.

Outside the tent where Togus Temur had the banquet, a lord of a hundred households got drunk. He greeted Defense Minister Manzi, who was on duty, and stumbled out of the camp. In the sandy air, he didn't know how far he had walked. When he came back with his senses, he already lost his way home.

This was not a joking matter. He tried hard to calm down himself and find the direction. He then headed back to the main camp. Suddenly, he found ahead of him there were many shadows. Because the air was filled by the yellow dusty sand, he couldn't see the faces of the men not far from him. He thought this was his camp. Filled with joy, he immediately ran forward. Not until he was near, did he discover that the men welcoming him was a group of soldiers covered in dust and were like just coming out of a sand bath. More seriously, the soldiers were not wearing the uniform he was familiar with.

They were the Ming troops.

The Ming troops stared at him like vicious wolves and elations appeared on their faces. They shouted and very soon many more Ming soldiers came up. They looked at him like looking a precious rare species of animal. He luckily became the first prisoner.

What an unfortunate day, I should have checked the almanac before setting out.

Fighting in the sand

Danger was imminent but the nobles of Northern Yuan were still drinking and feasting. But not all of them let their guards down.

Defense Minister Manzi was a man that maintained his alertness. According to history documents, this Manzi was very likely the one that was defeated by Li Wen Zhong at the Fox Ridge in year three of Martial Splendor (AD 1370). If the conjecture is true, then he was rather a character. Eighteen years had passed, many celebrity generals perished in the wind and rain. But this fellow was still fighting on the front line, old but still strong.

As the commander of the Northern Yuan army, he acutely sensed that not far behind the windy sands, danger seemed to be approaching him. Thus he added more soldiers on sentry duty. But the weather was really bad. When the sand was blown up, day was like night. Soldiers walked in the dark in the camp and coordination was very difficult. As the Defense Minister was worrying about it, the appearance of a group of people relieved him.

Now, the howling of the wind subsided, but what ensued was the rapid sound of horse hoofs. The Northern Yuan soldiers saw that just dozens of feet away, suddenly came out a column of cavalry devilish soldiers with diabolical looks! They came along with the darkness and blowing sand, just like the way how demons would appear in legendary folklores.

They didn't ask questions and rushed into the Yuan camp like a storm. They waved their sabers and chopped down anyone they ran into. Numerous Northern Yuan soldiers were scared in the darkness and thought they were the real demons from hell. They totally lost their will to fight.

But Defense Minister Manzi was obviously an atheist. He immediately recognized that these unwelcome guests were their nemesis, the Ming army. Thus he rushed to the rear side to organize the troops that had not been attacked. His mind couldn't be said more clear and reaction couldn't be said as faster. But the effort of just one man was not enough to salvage the Yuan army.

He organized his troops and rushed them to fight the Ming troops. But the Ming troops were now all excited. To find these enemies, they had suffered much in the desert and endured enough. They finally found their opponents and the anger that had been accumulating in their chests for days finally poured out. Each one fought like ten men and the Yuan troops weren't ready, many were still drinking and feasting. They couldn't match up against the Ming troops. The Ming troops sometimes dispersed and sometimes pulled together. They cut the Yuan camp into several segments and horded to kill the Yuan troops that were not able to mount horses. Defense Minister Manzi was rushed and hurried and couldn't have time to gather himself and his men. As he was directing the defense, a Ming soldier came to his back and struck him hard. The alert defender finally fell asleep forever.

After Manzi was dead, the Yuan army was in even more confusion. No one was thinking about to organize a counterattack, everyone just ran away. This was truly like, defeated troops

are like falling mountains, you run away and I run away.

Togus Temur, who was drinking in the tent, heard the noise outside. He panicked. Escaping required some talents. First a horse had to be secured and then once assured of the direction, one must suddenly and quickly rush out to ensure the success of the escape. On this, Wang Bao Bao was a virtuoso. Unfortunately Togus Temur didn't have the talent and bearing like the escaping Wang Bao Bao. In the hurry he only took his eldest son Tebonu and Prime Minister Shilemen. He left his wife and the younger son Debonu, along with more than a hundred thousand troops, to the Ming army.

This time all he had was gone.

The Ming army continued to chase the panic Yuan troops. In their eyes there didn't seem exist the theory to allow quarters to ones that gave up their weapons. They thrashed their sabers everywhere. The Northern Yuan army was in a complete upheaval. Death was threatening everyone. They were brave soldiers and they once ruled the world. But now they became lambs waiting to be slaughtered.

The emperor fled and the commander-in-chief was dead. It was useless to resist, thus many chose to lay down their weapons.

Prison food is still food, let it be so.

When Lan Yu came to the Northern Yuan camp, he saw hordes of prisoners and sheep and cattle, including the spiritless nobles of Northern Yuan. It was a truly real and complete victory.

He looked far to the edge of the sky and roared: Bo Ren (Chang Yu Chun's courtesy name was Bo Ren), we've finally put down them! We have lived a worthy life!

The Battle of the Fishing Sea thus ended. In this battle, the armed forces of Northern Yuan were completely annihilated. Debonu, the second son of the emperor of Northern Yuan, the wife of the crown prince, more than one hundred princesses and royal relatives, more than three thousand titled persons and nobles, more than seventy thousand soldiers, and more than one hundred thousand heads of sheep and cattle were captured. In addition, the imperial seal, which had been used for almost a hundred years by the Yuan emperors, was also captured.

Previously, regardless how the Yuan rulers were defeated and retreated, every time they fled at least with the seal was carried with them, from the Great Capital to the Upper Capital, from Yingchang to Helin, and then to the Fishing Sea. Irrespective how bad a place was, a temporary government could be set up just by erecting a tent. Officials were always available. If some were captured, some more could be named. This time, the seal was lost. The play couldn't be repeated any longer.

The news of the victory was quickly sent back to Zhu Yuan Zhang, who was not so much excited and elated as the officials imagined. Rather, he sat there silently. A struggle of twenty years and a war of twenty years are over. It has been too long and it seemed there was no end.

Now it finally ended. My enemy collapsed. Peace and tranquility will befall on my empire and my subjects. Lan Yu, you didn't disappoint me!

He looked at the military and civilian officials of the whole court and uttered the highest praise to his subordinate generals in his whole life: Lan Yu is my Zhong Qing and Yao Shi! (Zhong Qing was the famous Han senior general Wei Qing, and Yao Shi was the celebrated Tang general Li Jing.)

Under extremely difficult conditions, Lan Yu led more than one hundred thousand troops deep inside the desert. They fought valiantly and completely destroyed Northern Yuan. He accomplished the deeds that his predecessors didn't accomplish. He truly deserved the praise.

Northern Yuan bowing out

The fleeing Togus Temur was rather not as joyful as Zhu Yuan Zhang and Lan Yu. He lost his army and officials. Even members of his family were no longer with him.

Looking around him, he had only Crown Prince Tebonu, Secretary General Nychelei and Prime Minister Shelimen with him. Only dozens left out of an army of more than a hundred thousand. He had no officials and subjects and no soldiers. He lost all of his savings and could no longer afford to do the pillaging business. This time the defeat was real.

Why did I lose? If I moved a little farther, if the weather was not that bad, if there was no sandstorm, if I planted more trees, if I did better on environment protection, if there could be ifs, would I lose?

It's all useless now to ruminate on these things. Well, let me go to Helin for now. If Wang Bao Bao was able to rise up again there, I also can. All I need to do is shake off the defeat and reorganize. I should be able to revive the Yuan Dynasty and restore my ancestors' past glories!

But before the dream arrived to its destination, it was shattered on its way there.

The dream shattering place was Tuci River. Here, Togus Temur met a Mongol named Yesuder. What he didn't expect was that it was exactly this Mongol that ended the Northern Yuan.

Who was this Yesuder? We have to start from more than a hundred years earlier:

In AD 1259, The Mongolian Mongke the Great Kahn led an army to attack the Fishing City. But unforeseen by him, not only the city was not taken, he was also wounded by the stones

launched from inside the city. In addition, he was not able to acclimatize, he died soon after.

The death of Mongke resulted in a series of events. Kublai, who was attacking Southern Song, immediately withdrew and returned to compete for the throne. His competitor was his younger brother Ariq Boke. In this war for the throne, Ariq Boke lost and died in prison. Kublai eventually became the founding emperor of the Yuan Dynasty. He won.

Comparing to the other descendants of the Golden Lineage (Genghis Kahn's descendants were called the Golden Lineage), his victory lasted almost a hundred years. Even after being expelled out of the Central Plains by Ming forces, his descendants still kept the supreme position of the Great Kahn.

But losers would not be losing forever. Kublai's victory ended at Tuci River. The one who ended it was Yesuder. He quickly killed Togus Temur and his son Tebonu and took away the throne of the Great Kahn.

This Yesuder was a relative of Togus Temur's. But he also had another identity. He was the descendant of Ariq Boke. After more than a hundred years, he finally got his chance.

Hatred usually has longer lasting lives than love. History has proven this point many times.

After Yesuder killed Togus Temur, he became the Great Kahn of Mongolia and titled himself as Jorikyutu Kahn. But his victory also didn't last long. He died soon after. And the curse of death seemed to attach itself to the Golden Lineage. All of his successors died after they succeeded to the throne. The last successor of the Golden Lineage was Kun Temur, who died in year four of Establishing Civility (AD 1402). His subordinate general Kulichi usurped the throne, did away with Yuan and the dynasty's name, and reinstated the ancient name of Tartar.

Yuan thus died. The glow of the Golden Lineage evaporated.

One hundred ninety six years earlier, in Wonan River (present day Onon River in Mongolia), Temujin held a conference, in which, with all of his bravado, he looked at the nobles, who submitted to him, made the proclamation that he was succeeding the throne as the Great Khan of Mongolia. Thus since then he became the ruler of Mongolia. Temujin as a name was never used by people again; it was replaced by the Great Genghis Kahn.

This name was then heard all over the world, from Eastern Asia to Central Asia, to Western Asia, then to Eastern Europe. The Golden Lineage and its soldiers howled this great name and conquered the entire world. An empire that spanned across Asia and Europe was founded.

But in less than two hundred years, the great empire and the family that ruled it declined. The one time behemoth was left only with the fleeing from the Fishing Sea, the betrayal and murder at Tuci River, and the lonely silhouette under the setting sun.

It was over, everything was over.

Lan Yu started to go home. This battle propelled his reputation to the apex. From now on he would not be referred by people as the second Xu Da or second Chang Yu Chun. His name would be on everyone's lips along with the names of those celebrity generals.

The Battle of the Fishing Sea was the zenith of Lan Yu's life. But from thereafter he made frequent mistakes and eventually went to the end of his demise.

Chapter Twenty One

Lan Yu's Demise

Lan Yu's stupid moves

A stupid move is a Weiqi lingo. It means a virtuoso professional player makes mistakes that shouldn't be made. It is very appropriate to apply this phrase to Lan Yu. After leaving the battlefields, the brilliantly gallant great general seemed to be inseparably married to the word reckless.

On the way home, Lan Yu did something really despicable. He raped the wife of the Yuan emperor. The woman was someone who would not allow herself to bear such kind of humiliation, and she committed suicide.

Lan Yu's act violated Zhu Yuan Zhang's policies on race and was despised by people. Zhu Yuan Zhang was infuriated. But considering Lan Yu's great accomplishment, he didn't press for more investigations. But Lan Yu thought Zhu Yuan Zhang acquiesced and thus he became even more audacious.

Afterwards, he committed more similar kind of acts. When he arrived at Xifengkou, it was already night and the officials who garrisoned the pass already went to rest. They immediately ordered to open the gate when they heard people asking for opening the gate. But Lan Yu did something no one expected.

He ordered his soldiers to attack the garrison. They breached the city wall and forced their way in. He was rather proud of it.

This was too much. The people who were garrisoning the pass were their own men and they were already on their way to opening the gate. But you would rather not wait for even a moment, are you rushing to put off a fire?

Zhu Yuan Zhang was incensed by the two incidents. Initially he wanted to confer Lan Yu

the title of Duke of Liang. To warn Lan Yu, he changed the word Liang to Liang (Cold)[119]. From this we can see the change in Zhu Yuan Zhang's attitude toward Lan Yu.

It seemed that Lan Yu should have taken the heed. But he was doomed to be a man who would open a dye house just for having the ability to recognize two colors. He not only continued his reckless behavior, but also extended his reach to grabbing military power. Without Zhu Yuan Zhang's authorization, he named his own officers in his army to establish his power base.

All these of course weren't missed by the eyes of Guards in Brocade. Thus Zhu Yuan Zhang began considering how to handle the second Hu Wei Yong.

Lan Yu was a brilliant general. It would seem to be incredible that he would commit all these illegal acts after accomplishing a big success. But if we connect with the previously mentioned incident of Nayacu's surrender, Lan Yu's behavior is not hard to explain.

From his haughtiness in treating Nayacu at the banquet to his arrogance at Xifengkou, we can make this conclusion, which is: Lan Yu was a coarse man.

We call him a coarse man not because he was illiterate or rude in behavior, but rather because he acted without thinking about the results of his actions. He wasn't considerate to others and was a kind of man who did what he desired and did first and thought later. Actually his personality was always like that. If he didn't make mistake on one thing, he would later make mistake on another thing.

This is what is so-called that one's personality decides one's fate. The critical part of the problem was Lan Yu's fate was not in his own hands. To a large extent, his life or death depended only on Zhu Yuan Zhang's tolerance and patience. But Zhu Yuan Zhang was not a patient man.

Soon Lan Yu made a new mistake. Considering Lan Yu's accomplishments, Zhu Yuan Zhang made an exception and conferred him the position of associate grand tutor to the crown prince. We have explained previously, this was a position of secondary first grade. An average official could only have such a position in his dream. Having obtained such a position meant one had reached the zenith as an imperial official.

But Lan Yu was like someone who had taken the wrong drug. He boldly shouted in front of many others: "For what I have done, shouldn't I be the grand tutor?"

This was no longer about striving for excellence anymore. He was bored for having lived

[119] In Chinese the original word Liang is the name of a place, which was an ancient state and later a prefecture. It was also the name of a city. The other homophonic word means cold but it was also a name of a place and a prefecture with a city of the same name.

for too long.

Zhu Yuan Zhang couldn't endure anymore. If he could endure, he wouldn't be Zhu Yuan Zhang.

He once again pulled out his butcher's knife.

It needs to be explained that in history documents, there was another reason for Lan Yu's execution. According to *Annals of Ming*, Lan Yu's death had a strong connection with Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan.

Zhu Di was the fourth son of Zhu Yuan Zhang. His way and method of doing things were very much like those of Zhu Yuan Zhang's. Thus many people said he was the one most resembled Zhu Yuan Zhang. Later stories about this man should be already known to many. We don't need to discuss too much about him now, there will be more later on.

Lan Yu was Chang Yu Chun's wife's younger brother and Chang Yu Chun's daughter was a concubine of Crown Prince Zhu Biao. Thus Lan Yu was very close to the crown prince. After the expedition against Nayacu, the fellow met the crown prince and told him: "The Prince of Yan is not an ordinary man. Sooner or later he is going to revolt. I've got someone assessing his prospect and it shows an aura of the Son of Heaven. You should be careful."

Lan Yu fulfilled his duty as a friend and told the crown prince these words. His purpose was to warn the crown prince and hoped that he would be alert. But he forgot an adage. An outsider involves not the affairs of another one's kinsmen. You, Lan Yu, were at most a relative by marriage, how could you match up against the brothers of blood!

Later in a chat the crown prince told what Lan Yu said to him to Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan, who sent a very damaging report on Lan Yu to Zhu Yuan Zhang. On Zhu Di's urging, Zhu Yuan Zhang then moved against Lan Yu.

Certainly this was one of the versions. In my opinion, the main reason that Lan Yu was executed should still be his arrogance and flouting of the laws. Regardless of the reason, Zhu Yuan Zhang was about to lay his hands on Lan Yu.

If it was about to begin, a charge on Lan Yu would be needed first. After all, the procedure had to be followed. It couldn't be done by dragging someone out and beheading him for no reason. If Lan Yu was accused of petty thefts, no one would believe it. Also, at the time, behavioral flaws like keeping a mistress was even deemed a glorious thing.

It seemed it would be better to use the charge of plotting a coup. It was eye-catching as a headline and the purpose was clear. It was convenient and could be easily understood. We've been using it ever since.

In February of year twenty six of Martial Splendor, Jiang Huan, the commander of Guards

in Brocade, accused Lan Yu of plotting a coup. The last case of the four major cases of Martial Splendor finally unveiled itself.

Numerous heads would roll.

After Guards in Brocade submitted the charge, Zhu Yuan Zhang quickly arrested Lan Yu and sent him to prison to be interrogated. Fairly speaking, there was evidence of Lan Yu's flouting of the laws. But there was really no evidence of plotting a coup. As a newly ennobled general, without having a strong power base and sufficient preparation, Lan Yu wouldn't dare to plot a coup.

If a crime had to be found, there was no shortage of accusations.

Probably Lan Yu suffered much cudgeling in the prison, because the man who didn't have a plot for a coup wrote a long confession, in which he not only explained the motivation but also the strategy and location for a revolt. It seemed that in the prison he played the leading role of *Storms in Prison*.[120]

If Lan Yu admitted the crime, then having Lan Yu executed and the case could be closed. But just as we previously said, if Zhu Yuan Zhang did that, he wouldn't be Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Usually, in plotting a coup, there mustn't be only one person. That was the clue. It must be investigated further. Thus Zhang San, Li Si, and Wang Er[121] all came into light. Guards in Brocade was very experienced in conducting this kind of things (refer to the Hu Wei Yong case for actual procedures and methods).

How many people were finally identified? After the investigation, Lan Yu had accomplices of fifteen thousand. Based on this number, Lan Yu seemed to be a rather popular man.

Lan Yu and his family were all executed. Numerous people were dragged in. Among those executed, there were one duke, thirteen marquises, two counts, and numerous officials at various levels. Those who were fortunate enough and survived the case against Hu Wei Yong thought they were lucky but they didn't expect that they just merely lived a dozen of years longer. They eventually still couldn't escape the knife.

The ones who were executed in the Lan Yu case were not at peace even after their death. Their names were compiled into the *Catalogue of Traitors*. In my estimation, if all the fifteen thousand names were listed, then there were at least two words for each name. Adding the curtesy names, each name would consume five words. Then the *Catalog of Traitors* would be about from thirty to seventy five thousand words, long enough to be a master's degree thesis.

[120] This is an imaginary TV show or movie by the author. Such kind of a title is common and cliché in Chinese entertainment industry.
[121] See note about Zhang San and Li Si in chapter 5. These are all monikers denoting anonymous names.

But what's unique about the thesis was that every word in it was written in blood.

The Lan Yu case almost wiped clean of all the meritorious civilian and military officials of the Martial Splendor era. From the Hu Wei Yong case of year thirteen of Martial Splendor to now, it should have been enough already. Those who should have been executed were executed and those who should not have been executed were also executed. Everyone, take a break.

Lan Yu's life was full of drama. In the first half of his life, he was in the shadows of those celebrity generals and didn't get much chance to show himself. History wasn't unfair to him. In later half of his life he became the main character and accomplished his own deeds. But at the peak of his career he was pulled down from his horse. Was it the will of Heaven?

Of course it was not. Lan Yu's tragedy was not created by history but rather the inevitable result of his own character flaw. But the silver lining was he eventually didn't betray his reputation as a celebrity general. He proved himself by his own brilliant accomplishments. His everlasting deeds would forever remain in history books and commemorated by later generations.

Seeing from this angle, he seemed to be lucky.

In that night, I saw a million gallant troops in my dream.

The real motive

There was a more disguised reason for Zhu Yuan Zhang to brandish his butcher's knife in the Lan Yu case.

In fact everyone could see there was no reason to drag in so many people to just kill a little Lan Yu. In addition, Lan Yu was not Hu We Yong and he didn't have many accomplices. But Zhu Yuan Zhang killed many innocent people and accused them of being Lan Yu's accomplices. That should be something that deserves our further analysis. What was the hidden motive for Zhu Yuan Zhang's actions?

Our detective now needs to show himself again. As we have said previously, many seemingly unrelated things were actually closely related to each other. In the dry and boring history documents truth was hidden in them and it is just waiting for you to unearth. The Lan Yu case was so as well and its answer lies in the intriguing and complicated historical event. History detective, please start your investigation.

Let me first explain my train of thought. The Lan Yu case occurred in February of year twenty six of Martial Splendor. Using this as a clue, we take a look at what happened in about a year's period around this time. The events in that period should have a profound impact to

the handling of Lan Yu's case.

After some research and analysis, I found my answer.

History record: In April of year twenty five of Martial Splendor, Crown Prince Zhu Biao died of a disease. His son succeeded as the crown prince.

If we connect the events and think deeper, then it shouldn't be difficult to understand Zhu Yuan Zhang's actions. Zhu Biao was his eldest but not a legitimate son (his mother was a concubine). But Zhu Yuan Zhang made him the crown prince very early, thus it can be deduced that Zhu Yuan Zhang was happy with Zhu Biao. It was Zhu Yuan Zhang's deep affection toward Zhu Biao that prompted him to choose Zhu Yun Wen, the son of Zhu Biao, to succeed the imperial throne.

This choice should be said as not a bad one. From what happened later, Zhu Yun Wen was also a good successor. But the problem was Zhu Yun Wen was too young. He was unlike his father, who was tested in the travailing years of the dynasty's founding, and also didn't have the skills to manage the officials.

Lan Yu and the officials, scholarly and martial, who founded the dynasty, were adept at strategies and schemes. Only Zhu Yuan Zhang would be able to control them. Zhu Biao also carried certain prestige. In other words, he ought to be able to manage situations. But for Zhu Yun Wen, he would have no leverage. How could he yield the dynasty founded by his own hard work to someone else. The good weapons and running dogs must be purged first to ensure that Zhu Yun Wen would be able to keep his throne.

Modern history books basically hold the same opinion on Zhu Yuan Zhang's motive to execute the meritorious officials. But we shouldn't follow what others say. We should do our own analysis using the history documents and arrive at our own conclusions. This is the logical way to understand history.

Zhu Yuan Zhang executed those capable officials but he also had to be concerned with having the men to protect the country. But those bookworms who had never been tested in wars wouldn't be able to accomplish the task. Zhu Yuan Zhang found a perfect (at least he thought so) solution to the problem. He sent his sons to all the places. Historically these men were called guardian princes, who were allowed to own their own armed forces.

We have to appreciate Zhu Yuan Zhang's effort. He also worried the guardian princes might revolt. Thus he created a system to limit and balance the power of the guardian princes. We will later describe the system in full detail. It should be pointed out that his check and balance system on the guardian princes was good but not perfect. Even the most scrupulous man could miss something and Zhu Yuan Zhang was no exception. His system had a tiny

loophole and later events showed that although the loophole was small, it was fatal.

Another story could also illustrate Zhu Yuan Zhang's motive for executing those outstanding officials.

Once, when again Zhu Yuan Zhang was about to execute a large number of officials, Zhu Biao felt uneasy and advised him: "Your Majesty has killed too many, it may be injurious to the harmony." Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't utter a word. He ordered someone to find a thorny stick and placed it in front of Zhu Biao. He told Zhu Biao to pick it up. Zhu Biao was not an idiot. He saw the thorns and didn't pick it. Zhu Yuan Zhang said to him coolly: "Killing men is like removing the thorns from the stick. These are all dangerous men."

This story clearly illustrated Zhu Yuan Zhang's motive. But there was a second part to the story. From this part we can understand what kind of a person Zhu Biao was. Zhu Biao was the crown prince but he never had the chance to enjoy the prestige of being an emperor. But he was an important character and it's necessary for us to introduce him.

But unexpected by Zhu Yuan Zhang, Zhu Biao was not intimidated by his tone. The son who had been usually soft spoken and mild tempered even dared to refute, and his reply was very offensive.

Zhu Biao replied in the same cold tone: "Only if the emperor is a virtuous monarch like Yao and Shun, can the officials be the subjects who support Yao and Shun."

The words were too poignant. They implied that an emperor begets the subordinates of the same kind. If you self are not virtuous, how can you blame your subordinates?

Zhu Yuan Zhang was flabbergasted, that his meek son even dared to ridicule him! He was furious and grabbed a chair, just like the way he took up a weapon when he was fighting for the throne before, and threw it to the crown prince. Zhu Biao was agile and escaped the hit. But the tantrum thrown by Zhu Yuan Zhang really scared him. He immediately fell ill after he went back.

From this story we can see that Zhu Bio would really be a compassionate monarch. He was also brave enough to stand his ground and it showed he was soft outside and strong inside. Throughout his life, Zhu Yuan Zhang had shown his uncanny ability in recognizing talents. The successor he had chosen should be really good.

It should be noted that from Zhu Biao's statement we can see that he had an extraordinary insight. The statement "Only if the emperor is a virtuous monarch like Yao and Shun, can the officials be the subjects who support Yao and Shun" was insightful. If the later Emperor Dignified Auspice was able to understand this point, he probably wouldn't have lost his empire so quickly and even exclaim: "every official should be killed".

Regardless how it should be looked at, Zhu Biao was an ideal successor. He had followed Zhu Yuan Zhang since he was very small. He was amicable and kind to others. He maintained good relationships with the officials. He had seen battles and blood and never wavered. He was very experienced in handling state affairs.

Zhu Yuan Zhang also thought highly of Zhu Biao. In year ten of Martial Splendor (AD 1377) he already handed many state affairs to Zhu Biao. He also told Zhu Biao that the four key words in handling the important issues of the country were "compassionate, wise, industrious, and decisive". He placed all of his hope on Zhu Biao, who would be one of the only two people Zhu Yuan Zhang most trusted, one was Empress Ma, and the other was the crown prince.

But Heaven seemed bent on punishing Zhu Yuan Zhang. Zhu Biao died earlier than Zhu Yuan Zhang. The horrible news completely crushed Zhu Yuan Zhang, who passed the throne to the young Zhu Yun Wen, despite the oppositions of the officials. This showed his deep affection to his son.

Thus we can see that Zhu Biao was indeed a deserving and qualified successor.

But there were completely different records in some history documents, how could that be?

History can be tampered

One of the most important history documents about Zhu Yuan Zhang's record is *Chronicles of the Great Grandfather of Ming*, in which it writes as follow, just like the old formula, which said when Zhu Di was born, lights were seen everywhere and the room was full of color (refer to the description of the birth scene of Zhu Yuan Zhang for details). Then it says that Zhu Yuan Zhang liked Zhu Di very much and didn't like the crown prince and the crown prince's son. It even said Zhu Yuan Zhang repeatedly attempted to change his will and wanted to hand the throne to Zhu Di at his death, but his decree was tampered and obstructed by the crown prince.

These details look familiar and offer no new clues. But they are after all the history records and we have to discern them carefully.

As we have said before, this book is not about just describing the Ming history; it is also about showing the techniques of analyzing history. Just as we've said earlier, before reading a history document, we need to first know who the author was and what the motivation was. Once we've mastered this technique we can avoid many diversions.

The so-called *Chronicles of Ming* was the official recordings by the Ming historians. After Emperor Perpetual Happiness usurped the throne, he altered much of the history of the

previous emperor, which was an indisputable fact. To show he was not a usurper, Zhu Di paid great attention to the issue of succession and it was not unexpected that there were such kinds of records.

More convincingly, later historians and official documents of the history didn't adopt this version. The experienced historians carefully selected and analyzed the historical records and their treatment to this version of the record was of great importance.

Per the above analysis, we should be able to deduce that Zhu Biao and Zhu Yun Wen were the unquestionable successors. Indisputably, Zhu Yuan Zhang and Zhu Di were very alike in their personalities and ways of conduct, but that was not enough to prove Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to hand the throne to Zhu Di.

In fact, Zhu Yuan Zhang later recognized his rule had been too harsh. He inculcated his crown prince to "rule by compassion" and amended many of his earlier policies. Zhu Yuan Zhang was a mature politician and it was very logical that he chose the compassionate Zhu Biao as his successor.

Zhu Biao was an unfortunate man. He spent his entire life in Zhu Yuan Zhang's colossal shadow. He never had his own authority to rule and decide, and his life was short. His son Zhu Yun Wen was even more unfortunate. The father and son were more like brothers in peril.

Although that history has gone by for hundreds of years and the stories were already buried in yellow sand, we should still find the truth from the remnants of old papers and restore justices to Zhu Biao and his son. Belated justice is still justice.

Chapter Twenty Two

The Secrets behind the System

In the above chapters, we have described some of the important events in the Zhu Yuan Zhang era. It was a high level introduction to the early Ming's social and political systems, which had profound influences to the entire Ming Dynasty. More importantly, behind these systems there was a secret, which was hidden in Zhu Yuan Zhang's heart.

Zhu Yuan Zhang and the establishment of Ming's legal system

When talking about the establishment of legal system, it may be hard for us to associate the modern concept with a feudal monarch. But Zhu Yuan Zhang was indeed a remarkable man. He not only created comprehensive laws, but also successfully institutionalized the laws.

We have described previously that Zhu Yuan Zhang developed *Laws of Great Ming* and set up five types of corporal punishment. They were caning, cudgeling, imprisonment, banishment, and death. Translated into modern terms they were caning using small bamboo sticks, cudgeling using big wooden clubs, specified terms of imprisonment, banishment, and death. Of course, per Zhu Yuan Zhang's personality, he would not be satisfied with just these punishments. The five types were just the official punishments, there were many other variations, which had been described before and there is no need to add more here.

But in the law education of early Ming, the most important document was not *Laws of Great Ming*, but another document titled the *Grand Communique*. What kind of book was it? Why was it more important than *Laws of Great Ming*?

A book compiled by Zhu Yuan Zhang, the *Grand Communique* included profiles of more than ten thousand criminal cases and the progressions and penalties of the cases. They were assembled into volumes and widely distributed. Then why did Zhu Yuan Zhang want to promote the *Grand Communique* instead of *Laws of Great Ming*? If we do some more detailed analysis, we can see Zhu Yuan Zhang was indeed an ingenious man.

According to legalistic classification, The *Grand Communique* used actual cases, thus it

should be a case law. On this point, Zhu Yuan Zhang's idea seemed to resemble the Anglo-American legal system. Zhu Yuan Zhang correctly recognized that it was impossible for ordinary people to memorize and recite those laws. The actual cases were factual and detailed and each one contained names of real people. People could read at leisure times after meals, just like today we love to read crime stories. More importantly, it also included detailed descriptions of the tortures applied to the criminals, for example, scaling the skin using iron brushes, drawing out the intestines, slicing, and other special kinds of behavior arts. They were enough to make someone to throw up what he just ate and then swear that he would never run amok of the laws.

Including the crimes and punishments in the *Grand Communique* so that others were warned, was indeed an unprecedented invention.

But there were still problems because people of the time were not generally literate. Illiterate people were the majority, there was no Project Hope[122] and it would be a decent education if someone went to a private tutor. Everyone has seen in TV shows such scenes, in which a placard is posted at the city gate and numerous people are listening to someone reading it. It's not because the man is eloquent, but rather the others are illiterate. This reflects the reality that the populous was uneducated and even common legal cases were hard to be understood by the public.

Even if Zhu Yuan Zhang was the most resourceful, he wouldn't be able to read and listen as the substitute of many ordinary people. This was really a hard problem to solve. But being a unique person, in a unique way, Zhu Yuan Zhang found an ingenious method to solve the problem.

Here is how it actually worked: For example, if Zhang San did something against the law and he was about to be punished. The county magistrate already gave a sentence and the next step would be to send him to prison if the punishment was imprisonment or to exile if the punishment was banishment. But the runners wouldn't be in a hurry. They had another thing to do, which was to escort Zhang San to his home to find an item. What was the thing to find?

That was the *Grand Communique*. If it was found, then congratulations to Zhang San, if he was sentenced to be banished, he didn't have to go and he would be sent back to do prison time. If the sentence was death, he would be able to save his life.

On the contrary, if there wasn't this book at his home, then all was over. If Zhang San was sentenced to banishment, the runners would first congratulate him for saving the expense of a trip, then pull him out, and get his head chopped off.

[122] Project Hope was a charitable organization aimed to improve literacy in modern China in remote and poor areas.

Actually on legal basis, if someone had the book at home, it would mean that he understood the laws. Thus by common sense, the punishment should be harsher for someone violating the laws with the knowledge of it. But for the time being, this was probably the best method Zhu Yuan Zhang could come up with.

In this way, Zhu Yuan Zhang successfully promoted his laws. Although the effect wasn't necessarily the best, he nonetheless tried his best.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's special regulations

In the years of Martial Splendor, Zhu Yuan Zhang issued many strange regulations. If they were all written down, it would probably be in hundreds of thousands of words. Here we introduce only a few of them. Do not underestimate these regulations, behind which there were profound implications.

In those times, it was not permitted to use the word "death" to refer death. The dead person's social standing must be taken into account. The detailed regulations were as follow:

The emperor's death was referred to as collapse, the death of a noble or member of the royal family was referred to as demise, the death of an imperial official was referred to as expire, the death of a gentleman was referred to as unaccomplished, and only the death of a commoner could be referred to as death.

Such a regulation brought much onus to people. As an example, for the funeral of a government official, an altar for the mourning was set up for mourners to pay their respects. At the time there was a custom of "mourn by strangers" practiced by many. That is, the person who went to the funeral to pay the final respect wasn't necessarily familiar with the dead. Some might not even know the dead. But they were officials of the same court and if the dead ranked higher, they had to go regardless. It worked like following:

Upon entering the funeral hall, he must first locate the altar. Then if he didn't know the dead, he needed to memorize the name written atop the altar. Then he would knell down and sob: "bother such and such (the name must be correct), how could you have died so soon, here is your brother."

If you do that, then people would think you've come to disrupt the funeral. The person who was being mourned was an official, how come his death was addressed like a commoner?

The correct way was like this. Upon entering the funeral hall, he should go to ask the family members first: "what position did your lord hold in the government at his death?"

The family member replied: "My lord was the associate minister of the Department of Officer Recruiting of Ministry of War."

Now it was clear, that was a fifth grade position and the word to use should be “expire”. It seemed all set for the ritual.

Not yet, one more question should be asked: “Did your lord have an inherited title?”

The family member replied: “My lord inherited the title of count.”

Being a little more careful paid off, because it was almost a wrong word to use. Now he could go before the altar, kneel down, and wail: “Brother such and such, how can your demise have come so soon? Your brother is here.”

Well done. Alas, it was such an onerous ritual.

In fact the addresses were specified in previous dynasties as well but they were never seriously enforced. But in the Martial Splendor era, someone would be in a big trouble if the regulations were violated. In addition to the different words used in addressing death, ordinary people were also divided into several classes.

Occupation assignment system

People of the time were grouped by occupation into the following kinds: civil, military, and artisan. Civil reserves included scholars and doctors. Military reserves included officers, labors, bowmen, and storekeepers. Artisan reserves included craftsmen, caters, and tailors.

The grouping was very strict. It was mainly a convenience for summoning manpower. For wars, military reserves were called up. For construction projects, artisan reserves were called up. It seemed to be a fine system, but in reality it had many flaws.

For example, if you were a military reserve, then your son was a military reserve. If you didn’t have sons, then it would be as simple, just see if you had a male relative of serviceable age to fill the quota. If you didn’t even have a relative, then it was still not enough. Anyway, you had to find someone to fulfill the quota, you could abduct or deceit someone on the streets, how you did it was your own business.

If you were a cater reserve and you said you didn’t know anything about cooking, it wouldn’t matter. You just had to show up. As long as the quota was filled, everything would be fine. After all, I wouldn’t be eating the food you prepared and it wasn’t my business to care who would suffer from diarrhea.

We can see that this kind of grouping was very illogical. Not only the civil and military reserves were not allowed to convert, even in the same household, different occupations were not allowed to be transferred. In case of war, bowmen were needed but the men never practiced archery when they were young. Regardless, one was given a bow and he was in. The

fighting quality of such an army couldn't be upheld. If physician reserves were called up and those who came didn't know anything about medicine, people's lives would be at risk.

These were the matters only for ordinary people. Officials didn't fare any better. The color, material, and pattern for their attires were strictly regulated. Violators would be executed.

The ridges on the hat worn with the gown for official appearances were seven for grade one officials, six for grade two officials, and etc. They couldn't be more or fewer. There were garments for worship of ancestors and ceremonies. Official gowns were worn at the Court. Rules for the official gowns were very complex. Attires for officials from grade one to grade nine and civilian and military officials were of different color, pattern, and adornments. Patches on the gowns were also different.

There was no relaxation at home. One weren't allowed to walk around in pajamas. Casual wears were to be worn but they weren't allowed to be worn arbitrarily. There were rules for officials of different grades. As an example, for grade one the belt was made of jade, for grade two the belt was made of rhino horns, and the belts were all different for officials of different grades.

If you were not careful and wore casual attires at the Court, wore official gown at a worship service, wore the wrong belt, or wore a yellow undergarment, you'd be in serious trouble if found, you could even be executed.

These regulations seemed dazzling and confusing but they were connected. If we carefully analyze these regulations, we will find that behind these regulations there was a purpose.

Besides these regulations, Zhu Yuan Zhang also specified strict rules for his officials and subjects. He was noble as the Son of Heaven, yet he specified duties for almost all the administrative agencies in the country, which included public services, law enforcements, grain storage, population census, and even street sanitation. In addition, he also specified in detail how the work would be done, just like the user's manuals for present day's household electronics. He enumerated all the items and weren't afraid of exhausting everything, such as the things that required attentions in a population census and how the verifications should be done and listed the common methods used in cheating. If he went even further, he probably would even specify how to use brooms in street sweeping and which foot should be stepped out first when going out. In this way, it wouldn't be a tiresome job to work for Zhu Yuan Zhang. Surely if someone wasn't an idiot and was able to understand the manuals issued by Zhu Yuan Zhang, he would be able to do a good job.

He also prohibited peasants from working in the city. He specified everyone was allowed only to move around in the area where he lived. Checkpoints were set up at all major roads. If

one needed to go to another place, he was required to carry a passport issued by the government. The thing must be kept with good care, for if it was lost, the soldiers manning the checkpoints would take him as an escapee and he'd be arrested and sent to military service. There would be no way to go to the destination or back to home. May be after a few years, the fellow who lost his passport would stand at the checkpoint as an inspector.

Now everyone can see that Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to build a rigid society, in which people were divided into distinct classes and laws and regulations were fully enforced. In this society, peasants could only farm, merchants could only trade, officials did their jobs as specified, and no one was permitted to exceed the boundary. The grouping of people into military, civil, and artisan reserves meant in that era finding a job was never a problem. One didn't need to design a resume, wash his face clean, and wear a tie to go to an interview. Except a few capable ones who were good at reading books, everyone's job was already specified at birth. One just did whatever his father did.

It was almost a perfect model, in which everyone did his job and there was no interference. People worked just like countless number of parallel lines that formed the powerful Ming Empire. The regulations were so strict and complete that it would be a model system even in today.

We have to appreciate Zhu Yuan Zhang's effort. He not only founded a dynasty, but also exhausted his energy to create such a complete system of regulations and rules. His purpose was obvious:

"I have found solutions for all the problems in the Ming Dynasty. There are regulations and solutions. Descendants just need to follow what we do now. It doesn't matter that I have to work hard a little bit, you just need to enjoy your life."

But a model was still a model.

Flaws in regulations

In this world, there has never been any perfect thing. There are flaws and loopholes in any system. Zhu Yuan Zhang's system was no exception.

Reality proved his system couldn't withstand the test of time. In addition, there appeared many things even Zhu Yuan Zhang himself didn't expect.

Zhu Yuan Zhang eliminated the position of prime minister and restricted the power of the ministers, but the cabinets of Ming were more autocratic than any previous dynasty.

Zhu Yuan Zhang specified people would not be allowed to travel around. But in middle and late Ming, tramps roamed and were found everywhere. They were not confined at all.

Zhu Yuan Zhang published regulations that suppressed commercial development and specified that merchants could not were silk and other expensive garments. Yet large industrial developments of commerce started in Ming. And those merchants who were supposed to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy were bejeweled in gold and silver. Some even climbed up and became officials while being merchants.

Zhu Yuan Zhang issued stringent orders that prohibited eunuchs from being involved in government affairs. But every one of the Ming eunuchs was a heavy weight (this had something to do with his abolishment of the power of the prime minister).

Zhu Yuan Zhang set up titles and allowances for all of his descendants, but more than a hundred years later, many of his descendants' wealth deteriorated and they sank into poverty.

The systems that Zhu Yuan Zhang thought would last for thousands of years evaporated in just a hundred years. Even his successors didn't seriously follow those edicts. They purportedly claimed that the laws made by the Great Grandfather would not change for ten thousand years, in reality there were all kinds of variations. Occasionally there were one or two whose minds were still stuck with the outdated ideas would advocate returning to the systems of the ancestors. But they were scoffed and even the emperor wouldn't take them seriously.

Actually, to ensure the system and model would be followed and implemented, Zhu Yuan Zhang decreed severe punishments to those who dared to modify or violate them. For example, he explicitly specified any eunuchs who interfered with the government affairs would be executed, and anyone who dared to suggest reinstating the office of the prime minister would be executed. But the harshly worded edicts were never really put into actual practice. Eunuchs interfered with the running of the government as usual and the Cabinet continued to exert the power of prime ministers. If a road was blocked, it would be detoured and no one really took the laws of the Great Grandfather seriously.

What was more unexpected by Zhu Yuan Zhang was matters he cared progressed just in the opposite of the ways he hoped, like the usual saying, the more one tries to avoid, the more he runs into it. There seemed to be an invisible antagonist facing Zhu Yuan Zhang. Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to go east, the antagonist wanted to go west. Zhu Yuan Zhang wanted to eat food, but the antagonist would rather feed him water.

This antagonist was not a fake. We mentioned its name previously, the laws of history.

If we look into the details of Zhu Yuan Zhang's edicts, we can find many problems. For example, he decreed that merchants weren't allowed to wear fine clothes and their political rights were restricted. Violators were severely punished.

But could regulations like these be really implemented?

Peasants were entitled to wear silk but they couldn't afford. Merchants were at the lower rungs of the ladder but they had money. One had to have money to afford the expensive things. Peasants had no money, thus their rights were of no value. They couldn't even feed themselves, how could they think about what kind of clothes to wear? Was this a mockery on poor people (although his true intention was not so)?

There were many similar regulations, which themselves were of no significant problem. But unfortunately they couldn't be kept up with the changing situations. As the continuingly increasing income of the imperial government and the advance of the economy, people's ways of living and behaviors changed. The outdated regulations eventually would be abandoned by history.

The regulations issued by Zhu Yuan Zhang worked in the years of early Ming. Actually these regulations boosted the recovery and development of the economy. But, although Zhu Yuan Zhang was a capable man, he was not a superman and couldn't play the tricks like *Stop the Time*. He couldn't stop the progress of history. When he dictated that his regulations and methods would be followed as the *Eternally Unchangeable Ways*, the outdated stuff would become ridiculous and unusable seen by people of later generations. They became the stumbling blocks.

Throughout his life, Zhu Yuan Zhang had many formidable adversaries, the tenacious Zhang Shi Cheng, the vicious Chen You Liang, the importunate Northern Yuan, the sly Hu Wei Yong, and the haughty Lan Yu. All these were outstanding men of a generation. But they all fell before Zhu Yuan Zhang, until he met his last adversary, laws of history.

In the progression of history, the God of Fortune would pick some from the masses and offer them the opportunities for them to do great things. If you were selected, then it would be a lucky thing for you. But at the same time you also need to recognize this would be a cruel contest. When opportunity presented itself, if you really want to do great things, you must be much better and stronger than others. There can only be one final victor.

In a night of more than forty years ago, the God of Fortune came to the bedside of Zhu Double Eight and gave him a sword and a key. He told Zhu Double Eight: "Use the sword to overthrow the brutal Yuan and use the key to open the door to the new. You will found your own dynasty and acquire the glory that belongs to you!"

Zhu Double Eight accepted the two gifts. He didn't disappoint the God of Fortune. In those long and arduous years, relying on his uncanny military talents and political skills, he defeated all of his competitors and achieved the final victory.

He was no longer that poor penniless Zhu Double Eight, but the dynasty founding emperor Zhu Yuan Zhang, who possessed supreme powers! He thought he had enough power to change the old rules and create his own systems.

But he was mistaken, regardless how strong he thought he was, in the eyes of history, he was nothing more than just a little pawn.

He could impact few for eternity, he could also impact many for a moment, but he wasn't able to impact many forever.

Doubtlessly, Zhu Yuan Zhang was the most outstanding man of the time. He had extraordinary military and political talents. He was energetic. He was in power for thirty one years and worked diligently day and night. He was a genius and diligent. Was there anything in the world that he couldn't accomplish?

He believed he could control everything and change everything. Relying on his capabilities, he was already picked by the God of Fortune and became the ruler of this vast land. But he was not satisfied and he wanted to create a completely different social hierarchy and structure according to his own design. He believed just like before, he would win and things would go on according to his design.

But Laws of History, his opponent, was someone different from all others. He was invisible yet everywhere. He didn't bother Zhu Yuan Zhang the warrior but instead constantly annoyed his descendants. Zhu Yuan Zhang's system also deteriorated along with the erosion of time. It eventually lost its control and grip. History stubbornly went on according to its own logic.

Reality showed in this struggle, Zhu Yuan Zhang lost.

What was the cause? The answer seemed to be enigmatic but actually very simple:

Because Zhu Yuan Zhang was only a practitioner of history, he was not a maker of history.

If there wasn't Zhu Yuan Zhang, there would be Li Yuan Zhang or Wang Yuan Zhang to fulfill history's mission to overthrow the old dynasty and build a new dynasty. History is a hospitable host but He never allows his guests to take his place. History can never be dominated or created by one man or a few men. The saying "situation makes heroes" is indeed the truest maxim.

Then who are the creators of history? And how dominant is the Laws of History?

The real creators and manipulators of history were the peasants who diligently worked in their farms, the merchants who travelled on state highways, the officials who voiced opinions in the imperial court, and the students who studied hard under the forlorn lamps.

Yes, it was these ordinary people who created and dominated history. The majority of them

were destined to remain anonymous and weren't able to leave their names in history. But they were also great. They propelled history forward by their laborious toil. They were the real masters of history.

From ancient times to present, there has been no exception.

Having dissected Zhu Yuan Zhang's system, we go back to the Martial Splendor era and explain some of the events that had profound and long lasting impact to later generations.

The dreadful Guards in Brocade

Secret agent politics was unique to the Ming Dynasty. The agency of prominence was Guards in Brocade.

To us, the term "Guards in Brocade" is only a historical concept. But in Ming, mentioning of it invoked fear. This was a strange agency. It originated from an army unit and was one of the twenty six emperor's personal units, which were commanded by the emperor himself and each one had its own responsibilities.

It sounded like the emperor's personal forces would stay with the emperor all the time and working there should be a decent job. But don't be led into the thinking that someone would be able to climb high in ranks once he became a personal soldier of the emperor. For example, among the twenty six guards of the emperor's personal units, Guards of Mausoleums was responsible for guarding tombs. They lived among the tombs. If someone was unlucky enough to be recruited into Guards of Mausoleums, he probably would never be able to see a live emperor in his life time.

Comparatively, Guards in Brocade was much better off. It was the emperor's security unit, which was responsible for the security of the emperor when the emperor was out of the palace. In addition, it was also the guards of honor, which was responsible for proper etiquette of the imperial court. Members of Guards in Brocade wore uniforms, which were embroidered with fly fish and knives stitched with flower patterns. Because Guards in Brocade bore such important responsibilities and they were all men close to the emperor, gradually they became the eyes and ears of the emperor and took responsibilities for collecting information and punishing officials.

The significant characteristics of this agency was it was not under the jurisdiction of any ministry and answerable only to the emperor. Its hierarchy was also relatively simple. There was one commander (regular third grade) as the head, under whom there were a deputy commander, an adjutant, two enforcement officers, and fourteen knights of a thousand. These were the senior officers of Guards in Brocade.

In early Ming the men recruited into Guards in Brocade must pass rigorous background checks and interviews. They must be civilians in good standing without criminal records. They were chosen carefully and went through various kinds of trainings. Only the men who passed all these tests could become a guard in brocade.

The main responsibility of Guards in Brocade was to spy on the activities of officials and report immediately to the emperor. They were also in charge of court cudgeling in punishing the officials who disobeyed the emperor. In the eyes of the officials, these were a group of dreadful people. In the years of Martial Splendor, if an official had Guards in Brocade at his door, he would collect his clothes, bade farewell to his family, and leave without returning.

In addition, Guards in Brocade was also responsible for collecting military intelligence and instigate defections among enemy's senior officers. For example, later in the Ten Thousand Seasons war in Korea, Guards in Brocade was very active and collected a lot of information from the Japanese forces, thus contributing to the victory of the war.

Another aspect that made Guards in Brocade powerful was it was not under the supervision of justice and legal authorities. They could arrest, try, and sentence anyone. Before arresting someone, the commander of Guards in Brocade would issue a so-called Emperor's Invitation. You may have seen this thing in the TV series *The New Dragon Gate Inn*. Note that the Emperor's Invitation was not an invitation but rather an arrest warrant.

With this thing a guard in brocade could arrest anyone and no one would be able to stop him. If one resisted arrest, he would be immediately executed. Because Guards in Brocade possessed power that was above almost everything, people from both the Ministry of Justice and Office of Crime and Prosecution would try to avoid them.

Guards in Brocade also had its own prison, named the Prison by Decree, which was so infamous that its notoriety exceeded that of the Prison by Heaven run by the Ministry of Justice. The ones who were sent into this prison were all unordinary people. They were either the most loyal and virtuous or the most sinister and evil.

In practice these men were highly efficient. In both cases against Hu Wei Yong and Lan Yu, the men of Guards in Brocade hid in the day and worked in the night. They spied everywhere. Guided by the principle that regret not innocent killed but regret the guilty missed, they found many so-called conspirators and executed them all. The two cases also greatly improved the reputation of Guards in Brocade.

Unquestionably, these were men of terror. They had immense power and were not governed by anyone but the emperor and were an important tool of the emperor's rule.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang, the creator of the agency, keenly recognized the peril of politics of

special agents. He knew if this was allowed to continue without restraint, the discipline and prerogative of the nation's laws would be obliterated. Thus in year twenty six of Martial Splendor (AD 1393), he ordered the abolishment of Guards in Brocade and that all judiciary proceedings and trials must be conducted by legal authorities.

To show his resolve in abolishing Guards in Brocade, Zhu Yuan Zhang also burned and destroyed the torture equipment used by Guards in Brocade. It was intended to demonstrate that the equipment would never be used again.

But for many things, once they got started, they were very difficult to end.

Guards in Brocade, a very unique agency, would play a very important role in the history of late Ming. We will deal with it more later. For now, let's just put it aside.

An alliance formed

As Zhu Yuan Zhang was systematically resolving domestic issues, an unexpected incident occurred in the north eastern border of the Ming Empire. The incident would make a profound impact on the development of the Ming Dynasty later.

The incident occurred in the Kingdom of Korea.

The Kingdom of Korea was founded in the tenth century. The kingdom replaced the previous Kingdom of Silla and existed continuously afterward. But the relationship between the Kingdom of Korea and Ming was not good, due to historical reasons.

The Yuan Dynasty, after its founding, sent troops to attack Korea, which finally weren't able to withstand and yielded to the Mongolian Yuan. Then the Yuan rulers carried out its usual policy, which was to merge the once affiliated Korea into the Eastern Expedition Province of Yuan. Yuan also arbitrarily removed Korean kings. Its purpose was to take complete control of Korea via royal marriages. They thought in that way and actually also practiced that way. From the Generational Grandfather of Yuan to the end, the emperors of Yuan married seven princesses off to the kings of Korea.

In this sense, the tactic of using royal marriages would always be effective. Just in case someday the two sides went into war, all that needed was to drag out the close or distant aunts and read the family ancestry to prove that "Your Majesty is the neighbor of the cousin of my sister's son". With this, the opponent would be flabbergasted and withdraw and then go home.

Yuan achieved its goal. After years of match making that resulted in relationships in blood, three generations of Korean kings were descendants of Yuan royals. Of course, to find out the exact generation and how to address each other the family ancestry record would be needed.

Thanks to the blood tie between the Korean and Yuan royal families, Korea was still affiliated with Yuan after it was expelled from the Central Plains when Zhu Yuan Zhang founded Ming.

Zhu Yuan Zhang understood the importance of a stable border. After the founding of Ming, he sent representatives to Korea to inform the name of the dynasty and the title of the reign. The intent was to establish a suzerain-vassal relationship with Korea.

When pros and cons were weighed, blood ties sometimes didn't matter. The development of the events once again proved this point.

Seeing the defeat of Yuan, Wang Zhuan, the Korean king, cut off the relationship with Yuan, accepted Ming's conferment, and took the opportunity to extricate himself from Yuan's bondage. But there are always snags with something. There were still many relatives of Yuan rulers in the Kingdom of Korea. They weren't willing to subject themselves to the rule of Ming. Thus the battle between the pro-Yuan and pro-Ming forces began and it lasted for more than ten years.

Later, Xin Yu, the Prince of Jiangning, the ten year old adopted son of Wang Zhuan succeeded. The new king was pro Northern Yuan. But to avoid offending Ming, he sent ambassadors to request a posthumous name for his father (according to protocol the posthumous name of the King of Korea was affirmed by Ming). Originally everything went well. Ming sent representatives Lin Mi and Cai Bin to Korea. But the two were robbed on their way home from Korea. Not only their belongings were taken, they were also killed.

By common wisdom this should not have been carried out by Koreans. Doing this in their own territory was equivalent to writing down one's own name at the murder scene, it would be too ostentatious. This was probably perpetrated by Northern Yuan.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang was not someone easy to reckon with. Conspiracies were plotted against him and how could he let that go without doing something! He was enraged. He rescinded the posthumous name conferred to Wang Zhuan and indicated he didn't recognize Xin Yu as the king. Koreans felt they were out of means to have their grievances addressed, so they turned to Northern Yuan to request conferment and obtained the title of the King of Korea and Left Prime Minister of Eastern Expedition Province.

Thus Ming and Korea broke off and both sides flexed their muscles. A big battle was imminent. But although there was no recourse amongst swords and spears, there could be recourse among the men who bore the swords and spears.

The king of Korea decided to act. In year twenty of Martial Splendor (AD 1387), Feng Sheng and Lan Yu led the forces that defeated Nayacu, and thus took control of Eastern Liao.

In addition, Command for Department of Iron Ridge, which controlled Iron Ridge[123], was also created. This was a sensitive area because Iron Ridge was the border between Yuan and Korea in Yuan Dynasty. Korea always wanted to occupy this buffer region but the military actions by Ming undoubtedly disrupted the plan of the Kingdom of Korea.

Korean King Xin Yu apparently didn't have much political experience, for he even went to Zhu Yuan Zhang and asked for the territories of Iron Ridge. The request irritated Zhu Yuan Zhang, who had fought for dozens of years in wars and territories were exactly what he fought for. The youth king, out of blue, even dared to ask for lands from Zhu Yuan Zhang, who didn't even want to pay a dime more on salaries.

The result was just as imagined. Zhu Yuan Zhang harshly rejected the ambassador. The Korean king was also full of sap. He summoned forces from all roads[124] and ordered an expedition to Eastern Liao in year twenty one of Martial Splendor (AD 1388).

How many men were there in this expeditionary army? According to the *Chronicles of the Great Grandfather of Lee*, the army had forty thousand men. The force defending Eastern Liao was the Ming army that just defeated the Nayacu's Yuan army of two hundred thousand. When Northern Yuan was defeated and retreated to the desert, what means did the Korean expeditionary force have to combat the battle hardened Ming army?

But Xin Yu didn't think much about it. Perhaps he was calculating the fighting prowess of the Korean army with a 1 to 10 ratio.

Based on this, probably Xin Yu was befuddled in his recognition of the situation. But the general he sent to fight was not befuddled.

At least Li Cheng Gui was not muddled.

The commanders of the army were Cao Min Xiu and Li Cheng Gui, who were the left and right commanders-in-chief of the army. Li Cheng Gui had been always against the breakup with Ming. He tried very hard but was unsuccessful. As a military man, he clearly understood to attack Eastern Liao was like throwing an egg against a rock. But pressured by superiors, he still went out to lead the expeditionary force.

After arriving at Iron Ridge, Li Cheng Gui didn't launch an attack. He had other plans. The commander-in-chief first persuaded Cao Min Xiu, and then, by a gnashing of his teeth and a stumping of his feet, he mutinied.

He led the army and fought back to home. He deposed Xin Yu and founded his own dynasty, which was the famous Lee Dynasty.

[123] City of Iron Ridge in present Liaoning province.
[124] Road was an administrative unit of Yuan and Korea. It was equivalent to province.

To win support from Ming, Li Cheng Gui sent representatives to Ming as a vassal state. He sent state credentials to Zhu Yuan Zhang. A new man in a new situation, Li Cheng Gui abolished the name Korea. The new dynasty needed a new name.

The solemn task fell on the shoulders of Zhu Yuan Zhang, who after some serious considerations, took the meaning of "A country of the bright morning sun", and took a new name for the dynasty, Bright Morning[125].

Henceforth the name became the uniform title of the kingdom and has been in use to today. Zhu Yuan Zhang ordered that the Kingdom of Korea would be a country that would never be the territory for conquest. Ming and Korea specified the Yalu River as the border. Korea would respect Ming as the Heavenly Dynasty and adopt reign years of Ming. Thereafter all descendant kings of Korea would send ambassadors to Ming after succession to obtain Ming's affirmation and be vouchsafed of a title.

Both Zhu Yuan Zhang and Li Cheng Gui ratified the amicable and friendly relationship between Ming and Korea and both took the oath to look out and assist each other. Later history showed they both kept their oaths.

Li Cheng Gui's act to found a dynasty and the establishment of friendly relationship between Ming and Korea had impact to the development of Ming later. To a certain extent, there was also some sort of cause and effect relationship in today's influence on culture. How could we make such a claim? Let me explain:

More than one hundred years after Li Cheng Gui founded the Lee Dynasty, in AD 1506, the Middle Grand Father of Li succeeded. In his thirty eight years reign as a king, there was a doctor who, by his own effort, did something great. More than four hundred years later, the stories of the doctor were made into a TV series, which, for a time, was very popular.

This TV series is *Jewel in the Palace*.

Seen from this angle, the teeth gnashing decision by Li Cheng Gui indeed had a profound impact.

Korea became a vassal state of Great Ming. Northern Yuan was also beaten to its last breath and sent to cowering in the desert to eat dust every day. The powerful Ming finally settled its borders. Since the prosperous Tang, after a long hundreds of years, the governments of Central Plains finally were no more afraid of the attacks from the Nomads. A large empire stood up again. She relied on its own strength to ensure that the officials and people of the country would be able to live and work peacefully and the economy and culture were allowed to continuously develop without interference.

[125] In Chinese this is still the name of Korea today.

Today, we have to say this was indeed an extraordinary achievement.

Chapter Twenty Three

Finish and Start

By now, inside the Empire of Great Ming prosperity was flourishing and thriving. War destructions were things of the past. Economy recovered and the nation's treasury was being built up. Through his effort Zhu Yuan Zhang revitalized the land that had been ravaged by wars.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was also very satisfied. It should be fair to say he was a good father and a good grandfather. Because of his own childhood tribulations, he didn't want his descendants to suffer. To ensure his successors would be able to rule the world with a peace of mind and to keep the prosperity continuing to flourish, he created a comprehensive system for his empire. He firmly believed that as long as his descendants adhered to the system he created, the Great Ming Empire would exist forever.

But to ensure the throne would forever belong to his own descendants, he also needed to remove some people, which included Hu Wei Yong, Li Shan Chang, Lan Yu, and others (it is a very long list). After relentless efforts of more than twenty years and the bloodbaths of the Hu and Lan cases, he essentially solved the issue.

It seemed everything had been perfectly done. He had killed those who ought to be killed and purged those who ought to be purged, was that it?

No, not yet.

There were still a few friends to reckon with.

The last friends

In year twenty five of Martial Splendor (AD 1392), Zhu Yuan Zhang killed Zhou De Xing (readers should still remember him), who performed divination for him forty years ago. The fortune teller, who had already been conferred the title the Marquis of Jiangxia, finally fulfilled the prophecy: It's ominous to try prophesize either on fleeing or staying.

Indeed, he had nowhere to flee and nowhere to stay.

In year twenty seven of Martial Splendor (AD 1394), Zhu Yuan Zhang killed Fu You De, the Duke of Ying. A celebrated general of a generation thus perished. Killed at the same time with him was Wang Bi, the deputy of Lan Yu's and the Marquis of Dingyuan, who made great contributions in the Battle of the Fishing Sea.

In year twenty eight of Martial Splendor (AD 1395), Zhu Yuan Zhang killed Feng Sheng, the Duke of Song. The only remaining one of the six dukes who founded the empire still couldn't avoid the knife.

Kill, kill, for the future of the empire, if you don't go to hell, who else?

The old buddies had been dispatched away one by one, things could finally be settled.

Oh yes, there remained the last one, Tang He.

Tang He was someone who understood matters. Different from Hu Wei Yong and Lan Yu, he had always been very respectful of Zhu Yuan Zhang. Also, from very early he saw Zhu Yuan Zhang's strength and menace, thus he chose to give up on military power and enjoyed his rich and glamor.

Actually Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't completely eliminate everyone. Li Jing Long, the Duke of Cao (the son of Li Wen Zhong and thus inherited the title), Guo Ying, the Marquis of Wuding, and Geng Bing Wen, the Marquis of Changxing all escaped from Zhu Yuan Zhang's knife. But Tang He was different from them. As a buddy who rose up with Zhu Yuan Zhang, he was more influential than others and more threatening.

Therefore, although Tang He no longer commanded any troops, Zhu Yuan Zhang still went to see him. Of course, to a certain extent this visit would decide the life or death of Tang He.

When Zhu Yuan Zhang saw Tang He, he was surprised to see that the then brave and intrepid general could only lie in the chair. He had saliva dropping from the corner of his mouth and had to prop himself up to salute Zhu Yuan Zhang.

Tang He seemed to also understand Zhu Yuan Zhang's motive. He looked at Zhu Yuan Zhang in a way that an ordinary man wouldn't be able to understand. In his eyes there was pleading for mercy.

Do you really intend to get rid of all of us, Your Majesty?

Zhu Yuan Zhang understood the meaning of this kind of expression. Forty years ago, for survival and ideal, a group of poor but ambitious young men rose up and, after some strenuous struggles, overthrew the brutal Yuan Dynasty and founded the Great Ming Dynasty. They used to looking forward to the future and promising to each other that they would meet each other with wealth and glory. On the road to success, some died and some survived.

But now, among the ones who survived, there remained only one standing and one lying.

Zhu Yuan Zhang would not forget that in the City of Haozhou forty years ago, behind a corporal followed a modest and humble knight of a thousand.

After years of brandishing swords and hatchets and flickering candle lights, all those old time friends have left. Some died for me and some were killed by me. The so-called Lonely Ruler will be just like so.

Tang He, go on living. After those exciting and tumultuous times, only you and I are left among those who struggled heroically and lived and died together for a cause.

I am very lonely.

Having dispatched off those old friends, Zhu Yuan Zhang finally felt secure. The beautiful mountains and rivers would forever be under the grip of his descendants. Ironically, although many things that he could never dream of occurred later, the last assessment was always accurate.

Although it was nice having burned the finest bows and killed the hunting dogs, problems also ensued. The Mongol cavalry still harassed at the borders once a while. This was understandable, for the Nomad people were not adept at farming, once they retired from the position of being the ruler, it was very difficult for them to find jobs again. Crops, clothes, and treasures wouldn't fall down from the sky and the best way to obtain these things was to resort to the old job, robbery, which was not by choice. Men had to live.

Zhu Yuan Zhang grew old. He was no longer the dashing young man who could fight across thousands of lis. The long wars and heavy office work bent his torso and eroded his spirit. Notwithstanding the robbers at the moment, what if there was a second Mongolia, who would go to fight?

Young men, who knew only about reading books on military strategy, were still not reliable. Wars, which required precise thinking and accurate assessments, were not children's games. Li Jing Long was not old. But he was nothing, except that he was the son of Li Wen Zhong. But all those capable and experienced men had been executed. It was another hard problem to solve.

But just like before, Zhu Yuan Zhang was always able to come up with a solution. He found a man who had exceptional talent on military matters. The man would be able to accomplish the task of ensuring the safety of the country. More importantly, this man's loyalty could be absolutely trusted.

This man was the protagonist of our next act.

Seed of trouble

In April of year twenty of Utmost Justice (AD 1360), based on reliable information, it was known that Chen You Liang was commanding a large force to attack Yingtian. The force was very powerful and civilian and military officials were all disturbed. At the moment when the smell of battle filled the air, a concubine of humble root gave birth to a son for Zhu Yuan Zhang. It was really not a good time to deliver a child. Many people were already packing up and ready to be on their own ways. No one had the time to take care of this mother and her son. Zhu Yuan Zhang, as usual, went to see them. But that was about it. For him, the most important matter was to stay alive. He already had three sons. One more wouldn't be too much and one fewer wouldn't be too few.

The baby born into the dangerous environment was Zhu Di. By jus soli, his residence registration[126] would be Nanjing.

Although he had a residence certificate of Nanjing, the environment into which he was born wasn't necessarily any better than that of Zhu Double Eight's. At least the family of Zhu Fifty Four didn't have to worry about losing their heads.

With a birth cry, a legendary emperor from now on left his mark in history.

There is an ancient saying: Those who are virtuosos of swords would die under swords.

The baby, who was born into a war, seemed to be destined to later die on the way of an expedition.

Zhu Di lived through his childhood in a unique environment. His mother was not the Empress Ma, although this was affirmed in *Chronicles of the Grandfather of Great Deeds* in *Chronicles of Ming*. Evidence indicates that his mother was another person, whose life was very mysterious, to which we'll have detailed analysis and description.

Although he changed his birth records after he became an emperor, he could only fool posterity (now it seems even this was not accomplished). At the time he wouldn't be able to use this kind of crappy trickery to fool Zhu Yuan Zhang. Although Zhu Yuan Zhang was very busy, he certainly was aware which wife gave birth to his son.

Because his mother was of a humble root and he was not the eldest son, from his childhood, Zhu Di never received good treatment. Of course this was in comparison to his elder brother Zhu Biao.

Zhu Biao's mother was not of high birth, but because he was the eldest son and also he was

[126] Residence registration is a system unique in modern China, particularly under the current communist rule. Basically a resident has to be registered with the government at birth. The registration is not just a proof of residency. It is basically a means for controlling people's lives on almost all aspects.

genuine and honest, he was very much loved by Zhu Yuan Zhang. On January 4 of year one of Martial Splendor (AD 1368), which was the day of the founding of Ming, he was installed as the crown prince.

But Zhu Di was inculcated since very young that he would be only the subject of that successor high above. Once that man took over the throne, every time he heard his instruction (decree), he must kneel down and receive it wholeheartedly. Even if the instruction was to send him to death, he must obey and kowtow to thank him for his generosity.

For what reason? Just because he was born a few years early?

The unfair treatment became more apparent as Zhu Di grew up. Zhu Yuan Zhang paid great attention to the education of Zhu Biao. He created the East Palace of the Crown Prince. He also sent Song Lian, the most famous scholar of the time, to guide the study of the crown prince.

In addition, he also designated Li Shan Chang as the master tutor of the crown prince and Xu Da as the associate master tutor of the crown prince. If the crown prince had any questions, he would be able to receive the guidance from the two at any time.

This would be considered the most luxurious arrangement of the time. The best military and civilian officials were clustered around the crown prince, who received good education under their guidance.

On the contrary, Zhu Di's experience was different. When he was born, Zhu Yuan Zhang was a common labor, although a relatively special kind of labor, a rebel. But among the numerous ones on rebellion during the end of Yuan, Zhu Yuan Zhang was only a small business owner, who, day by day, led a risky life. Thus he didn't have the time to care for the son in obscurity.

Later Zhu Yuan Zhang's situation, status, and social standing gradually improved, but Zhu Di didn't get any better treatment. With the improvement of Zhu Yuan Zhang's grade, his wives also became more and more. His reproduction ability should be also praised. Without anyone else's help, in total he fathered twenty six sons and more than a dozen daughters.

In addition, he also adopted more than twenty sons. By a rough estimate, all these men were enough to form a reinforced platoon.

If Zhu Yuan Zhang reviewed the army of Zhus and called for a son, then the chance that Zhu Di would be called out was probably one fortieth or one fiftieth.

Why bother to be born in a royal household?

Comparing to Crown Prince Zhu Biao, Zhu Di's education was also problematic. He didn't seem to have received any regular nursery or kindergarten education. His childhood was the

golden time when Zhu Yuan Zhang was grabbing lands. Except to the crown prince, Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't pay much attention to the education of his other sons. In addition, he spent most of his time with Zhu Yuan Zhang's soldiers and generals. There were very few civilians who were qualified as teachers. Except the few like Li Shan Chang, who voluntarily came to join him, most of the educated men were "invited".

In real life, the word "invite" was practiced as threatening, deceiving, kidnapping, and other various kinds. Men like Liu Ji, Ye Chen, and Zhang Yi were all "invited" over in this way. For an educated man, it was relatively easy to get a job and feed himself and he didn't have to rebel.

Thus Fate decided that every day what Zhu Di saw was pretty much those sword brandishing and armor cladding generals and those seriously wounded soldiers without limbs. What he heard every day was something like how many heads were chopped and how much stuff was pillaged, which was the kind of things not suitable for children. Slowly, he was assimilated.

Even after the situation was improved, Zhu Di's education was never the focus of Zhu Yuan Zhang's attention. He didn't have a scholar like Song Lian teaching him. Although he had the title of prince, he didn't seem to have the appearance of a prince. If we grade them by their grades, then Zhu Biao would be the honor student in the class and Zhu Di would be the youth who didn't want to study hard and was abandoned to the society.

Mao Ze Dong once had an appraisal to Zhu Di's literal proficiency as half literate. Certainly that didn't mean Zhu Di was illiterate, it was in comparison to the education of the royals. By historical records and the changes to the documents submitted for his approval, the appraisal was to the point and accurate. He really didn't have any literary talent. He was not even as good as the once uneducated and later self-learned Zhu Double Eight.

But in real life, as an indisputable fact, an honor student usually does no better than a societal youth.

Unlike his brother, in his youth, he usually hung out with generals and it seemed the only thing that attracted his attention was discussions about combat. In addition, he had a good relationship with one of his cousins. They often travelled together. It's fair to say his cousin was also a member of the royal family and shouldn't impose any bad influence on him. But the problem was that the main work focus of this cousin was rather peculiar.

This cousin of his was Li Wen Zhong.

Li Wen Zhong was a celebrated general secondary only to Xu Da and Chang Yu Chun in reputation. Some even thought his military capability already exceeded that of Chang Yu

Chun's. With Li Wen Zhong, except combat, there was nothing else to chat about. This experience benefited Zhu Di immensely. He learned much military experience that was obtained through blood and lives.

In addition, he had another acquisition, which was Li Jing Long, a song of Li Wen Zhong's. Because Li Wen Zhong was much older than Zhu Di, naturally Li Wen Zhong's son became Zhu Di's buddy.

Zhu Di's early experience made him a precocious child. After some interactions with Li Jing Long, he clearly saw that comparing to Li Wen Zhong, Li Jing Long was an idiot in military affairs.

A saying says a dragon begets a dragon and a phoenix begets a phoenix, and the son of a rat can dig holes. Although Li Wen Zhong couldn't be compared with dragons and phoenixes, he at least could be said a tiger. But his son could only be said a rat.

Later events showed Li Jing Long was not only an idiot on military affairs, but also a yellowbelly. Certainly these personalities of Li Jing Long's were all memorized in his heart by Zhu Di. He was convinced that sometime in the future he would find use of them.

In this way Zhu Di grew up. His mother was of humble birth and didn't receive much affection from Zhu Yuan Zhang. He had three elder brothers and twenty two younger brothers. Thus although as noble as a prince, he didn't receive much attention, just like the wild grass by the wayside. But what irked him the most was that Zhu Biao was able to enjoy all the special privileges. He used the best wares and ceremonies on him were the most grand. Military and civilian officials would have to obediently and timorously kneel down to salute him when they saw him.

Officials knew that the man named Zhu Biao would in the future to accede to the throne as the new ruler of a new generation. If they wanted to keep their heads and positions, they had to lick his boots. Who the hell are you, Zhu Di? You don't rule the sky above and the earth down below. You'd better go out to your country and just live as a country landlord!

Men don't value poverty, men value comparison.

Zhu Biao seemed to have all the rights to enjoy these privileges because he was the crown prince.

What is a crown prince? Everybody is the son of poor peasant Zhu Double Eight. I knew you when you were wearing the bottomless pants. Who didn't pee in bed and fool around? You think you are the dragon son, who doesn't know who you are?

Children of a pauper mature early. Although Zhu Di wasn't poor, he was rather pitiable because regardless how good or wealthy the family was, in the end it wouldn't be his.

Realizing this since early on, Zhu Di was not as naïve as the children of the same age.

He knew in this family, if he wanted something he had to rely on himself to get it.

I must succeed.

In year four of Martial Splendor (AD 1371), the eleven year old Zhu Di was conferred as the Prince of Yan. This was not an indication that Zhu Yuan Zhang paid special attention to him. According to history records, all of his twenty six sons were conferred the title of prince. So it was just a usual business. At age seventeen, by the arrangement of the Zhu Match Making Service, he married his first wife, who was a daughter of the top most celebrated general Xu Da.

In this sense, this marriage of his also had some political implications, which demonstrated some sort of alliance between Zhu Di and the military officials.

At age twenty one he took the order to take the post as the prince of his country Beiping, which was the Great Capital at the time and present day Beijing.

Although Zhu Di was still young now, he already tasted the sweetness and bitterness of the human world and fully experienced its cruelty. As a prince, he was more acutely aware of the despicable conducts of the officials, who were sycophantic to the ones in favor and more than willing to add insults to injuries to those out of favor.

Of course he also understood there was nothing wrong with the conducts of these men, glory would always be on the side of the successful, which is a truth that had never changed.

I must be a successful man.

He already experienced combat in his childhood. Also, in his growing up he always interacted with military officials. He saw tragic battlefields and bloody killings. All these he experienced in his youth had defined his lifetime role as a professional soldier. This role would stay with him for his entire life and dominated his personality, even after he acceded to the throne.

Of course fairly speaking, the Zhu Di now didn't have the ambition to revolt. It was really just the imbalance of his feelings. For the most part he just wanted to complain. As an obscure prince, the most important job for him was to show himself to Zhu Yuan Zhang, so that he would get more when they needed to divide up their inheritance.

In year twenty three of Martial Splendor (AD 1390), he finally began his first performance on his life's stage.

Now it was already two years after the victory at the Fishing Sea. The then commander, the ever increasingly haughty Lan Yu was already on Zhu Yuan Zhang's black list. In this

circumstance, Zhu Yuan Zhang certainly wouldn't give the command to him. After some careful considerations, he gave the command of the army to two of his sons.

Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan, was one of them.

Ever since ten years ago being conferred and sent to Beiping, Zhu Di had been dealing with the principality's neighbor, the Mongol cavalry. Because the two sides lived close to each other, they often quarreled on disputes like the real estate boundaries. They fought if talks didn't work. They talked once the enemy was subdued. When he wasn't able to subdue and talks didn't work, he would request Zhu Yuan Zhang to send expeditionary forces.

Celebrated generals like Fu You De, Feng Sheng, and Lan Yu had all commanded forces to attack Mongolia from Beiping. Although Zhu Di was a prince, he understood that in front of these seasoned generals, he was still too green. So, being a prince but showing no signs of being condescending, he humbled himself to learn from these well-known generals. In addition, he followed the forces into combat and witnessed in person the sword slashing back and forth struggles and the blood streaming and bodies lying brutality.

When Zhu Biao was studying Confucianism and gospels of saints in the comfort of royal palace, marching forward in the battlefields strewn with dead bodies, Zhu Di was loitering in the desert of blustery wind under the cold moon. No one taught him how to become a good emperor and rule his people in the future. To Zhu Di of this moment, surviving a combat was the only goal. Military books didn't matter and the experience of others couldn't be copied. To win in this war, one could rely only on himself.

Learning war from wars and seeking victories from defeats, Zhu Di eventually mastered the rules of war after being brutally tested for so many times. He grew up from a war enthusiast to a master of war. Being able to make sound judgement and having a strong will finally enabled him to obtain the quality to become an excellent general.

At the same time, countless number of killings and numerous anonymous dead bodies also completely congealed his heart.

Ones who were frolicking yesterday would become dead bodies the next day. Their names might not even be found in the casualty list. Their families would not know. Even after the war when causalities were tallied, these men could still be discarded as leftovers.

Who would know that they once lived in this world? Who would know they once took wives, fathered children, and had aging mothers and infant children waiting for them to return home? In these places, was there a value for life?

The brutal combats made Zhu Di recognize even more the essence of the world, only the strong would survive!

With a will and belief like this, Zhu Di led his troops on the road to expedition.

In year twenty three of Martial Splendor (AD 1390), Zhu Di was thirty and became for the first time the commander-in-chief of an army.

Becoming a commander-in-chief and leading an expeditionary force was once his dream. In his childhood he often had been in the scenes where those celebrated generals marched. Those moments were so glorious. Armors shining, horses neighing, tens of thousands would listen to your orders and march forward without hesitation under your flag!

In fact wars had their own charm. Ride to your enemy, give an order, and thousands of troops will rush forward and horses will gallop crisscross, how wonderful a gallant act that is!

Zhu Di fell almost maddeningly in love with this kind of brutal charm. When he put on his armor and mounted on his horse, excitements naturally burst out of his heart. I have the spear in my hand, anyone dare to challenge me?

This would be a soldier's happiness and glory.

But Zhu Yuan Zhang could not place his trust on Zhu Di entirely. He divided the force into two and offered command of the other half to the Prince of Jin. He also made the battle plans for them. There were two targets for this expedition. They were the Northern Yuan's Prime Minister Yachu and Defense Minister Nabuwa.

Zhu Di understood this expedition was a test from Zhu Yuan Zhang. If he got a good score, he would have a good future. Thus he prepared very well for this expedition. Like the previous ones, this expedition was not about if they could defeat the enemy, it was about if they could find the enemy.

Correctly recognizing this, as soon as the march started, Zhu Di didn't rush forward. He first sent cavalry to reconnoiter. After some thorough search, they found the exact location of Nabuwa. After ensuring the secrecy, Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan and his troops quietly set out.

Because Zhu Di kept his movement under strict secrecy, Nabuwa didn't know anything about it. Following Zhu Di's plan, the Ming forces prepared to launch an attack to Northern Yuan. But just when the troops were about to arrive at the destination, it suddenly snowed. Many people thought it would lower the moral if they marched in the snow. They asked to stop the march and complains were rampant in the camps.

Unexpected by many, Zhu Di was very happy. He seemed to have taken the cue from Lan Yu's action. He issued strict order to continue marching forward. Apparently, Zhu Di's decision was correct.

In a blizzard night, marching was arduous, but the enemy also would let their guards down because they also thought that kind of weather was not good for marching. But the

opportunity for victory lied in the unexpected.

> *Never do anything your enemy expect you to do. The reason it's very simple, because the enemy hopes you do it - Napoleon Bonaparte.*

Just like previously when Lan Yu attacked Qingzhou in the night, Zhu Di's force marched toward the enemy in heavy snow. When his force arrived at the camp of Nabuwa, the Yuan troops were shocked. But what shocked them more was yet to come.

The army that had come from very far didn't launch the attack right away. Rather, they set up camps and started digging and cooking.

The Ming troops have marched so long and endured so much. We are totally unprepared and unguarded. If the enemy launches an attack, it won't take long for us to totally collapse. But the enemy remains stoic. Judging by their knife brandishing demeanor, they don't seem to have come here for sightseeing. What's on their mind?

Zhu Di was not a fool. He understood very clearly it was the best time for an attack. The totally unprepared Yuan army could be defeated by just one stroke. He didn't do it, not because he was too proud and wanted to win a reward for fair competition. Rather he had a more thorough consideration.

After getting the troops settled down, he sent a man to the Yuan camp to meet Nabuwa. He wanted offer Nabuwa a surprise.

Surely enough, when Nabuwa saw this man, he was shocked and shouted out: Why? Is it you again?

Why did he say "again"? Because the guest was rather an old acquaintance, Guan Tong. You may still remember that previously in year twenty of Martial Splendor when Feng Sheng was on an expedition against Nayacu, the one who persuaded Nayacu to surrender was also this fellow. In this aspect he could be considered as a seasoned secret agent who specialized on this kind of activity.

After Nayacu, Guan Tong's persuasion became well-known in Mongolia. Whenever there was news about the appearance of this man, every Mongol tribe would be immediately on high alert, lest they be considered as secretly communicating with Ming, which would not let one clear himself even if he jumped into the Fishing Sea. Ironically Guan Tong and Nabuwa were very close to each other. Meeting a good friend of old times at that moment certainly induced an uneasy feeling.

As usual, Guan Tong first explained the policies of Ming, such as offering good treatment to the prisoners. Then he laid out the current situation to Nabuwa, if he resisted, death was the only outcome.

Actually Guan Tong didn't have to say much anyway, the sound of knife sharpening could be heard outside of the camp. If there was no surrender, the whetstone would be substituted by one's head. There was no alternative but to surrender under the menace.

Nabuwa decided to surrender. He and Guan Tong went together to Zhu Di's camp to complete the process. The defense minister of Northern Yuan was very curious about and interested in Zhu Di, his adversary. He was so accurate on timing and he moved so quickly, what kind of person was he?

Unexpected by him, as soon as he walked into the camp, Zhu Di welcomed him with the kind of courtesy befitting a dignitary. He went out of the camp to receive him. Nabuwa was totally unprepared for it and didn't know how to react. It took him a while to realize that he had come to surrender. He carefully requested conditions like ensuring the safety of the soldiers. Zhu Di was magnanimous, not only did he accept these requests he also held a banquet in Nabuwa's honor.

Nabuwa never thought he would be so graciously received and well treated giving that he was surrendering to Zhu Di. He was deeply moved and immediately went back to his camp to line up his troops to surrender.

Just like this, for the first time in his life, the performance of Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan, closed the curtain. He didn't have to spend a single casualty to destroy the main force of the Northern Yuan army and accomplish his strategic goal. His action in this performance was perfect. Even the surrendering Nabuwa regarded him highly, for he thought he was a magnanimous person.

The formidable Zhu Di

In history records that was about it. On the surface, it seemed it was just an ordinary battle. But after I've carefully read it, I felt a chill in my spine, Zhu Di was so formidable.

What made Zhu Di formidable was not how many prisoners he took, but rather his capability and mental fortitude he exhibited in this military action.

He led tens of thousands of soldiers to find the enemy after an arduous march of a thousand lis in the blizzard and snow. It was like in a treasure hunt movie, in which a group of pirates finally found the treasures after tedious and exhausting labors. One can believe that anyone in that kind of situation would become extremely excited.

I'll be rich! My life will change forever!

Zhu Di at the time was just like so. He found his enemy after a laborious and exhausting search and the enemy was also vulnerable. If he simply issued an order, the enemy would be

defeated. But he didn't do that, which was like when the pirates found the island where the treasure was hidden, they opened the chest and saw the abundant gold, silver, and jewels. But the leader suddenly said: Let's go home, leave the treasure here and we'll come to take it next year!

If there was any woodenhead dared to say something like that, he would probably have been taken care of by his henchmen.

Simple possession is whimsically clever. Great wisdom is in the momentary restraint.

For this moment Zhu Di had waited for a long time. Victory was in front of him and he finally had his chance to show his ability. His father would have a fresh look at him. It was a great temptation!

But he restrained himself, although it was temporary.

He ignored the urgings from the knife brandishing subordinates. He didn't order to hack down those stunned Yuan troops. For the time being, he put aside the glory he was about to acquire.

What kind of endurance and restrain would that be required!

This was truly why Zhu Di was formidable. He was one who would endure and one who would suppress his own desire.

Don't overlook this episode of the expedition. If you carefully analyze, from this incident you will be able to find the secret in Zhu Di's personality.

In history, there were two completely different kinds of records on Zhu Di, which also reflected the two sides of him. On one side he was compassionate and merciful. He often spent time together with ordinary people, loved them, and upheld justice on their behalf. On another side he was brutal and cruel. He killed his senior officials who disobeyed him by putting them into boiling oil pots and executed all of their relatives.

These seemed to be contradictory. How could one person behave so differently? But all these were historical records. How should we explain this?

The answer is simple. Zhu Di had a two sided face not because he was a lunatic or had dual personality. On the contrary, he was a man with a very clear mind. He knew very well what he was doing. The two faces wouldn't appear at the same time. They had different usages.

The compassionate and merciful face was used to work with those who obeyed him. The brutal and cruel face was used to work with his enemies.

To Zhu Di, cruelty was a means and placating was another means. What means to employ was secondary, achieving his goal was the real purpose.

To achieve his goal he would suppress his feelings, to achieve his goal he would reluctantly do what he didn't like to do, and to achieve his goal he would user any means available! That was Zhu Di's view on life and the world.

From a naïve child to a shrewd prince of a remote region, it was the treacherous court politics and the life and death combats in the battlefields that changed him.

Zhu Di was born into a web knitted together by power. He grew up in a world where interests intersected. Wherever there were interests there were squabbles. Even if you didn't want to trouble others, so long as you had the title of prince, troubles would come to you. In this kind of life, father, mother, brothers were all just symbols. For whatever reason and at any time, they could become your enemy.

If you couldn't trust your relatives, whom could you trust?

Regardless of time and place, no one can be trusted. You have to rely on yourself on everything. That was what was tragic about Zhu Di.

In this world, you can only ensure your own safety by becoming strong enough, enough to the point that no one dares to offend you or harm you.

That was the rule on power that hadn't changed for thousands of years for those imperial royals who, on the surface, looked grandiose.

In this kind of environment Zhu Di gradually discarded his childhood naivety and dream and accepted and mastered this rule.

He became a strongman but also paid the price, which was very reasonable because there is nothing free in this world.

The generosity shown toward Nabuwa was a kind of restraint. Zhu Di didn't have any compassion toward the Mongol. How could not he think about cutting down the man who caused him to have traversed all over in the icy snowy weather? Based on his brutal behaviors later, he was not a mild tempered person. But he still received the man courteously and even held a banquet for him. What a restraint would that be required! Coming to this point, you have to admire Zhu Di. He was truly a formidable man.

The thirty year old Zhu Di was able to do these. In this respect, he was even better than the Zhu Yuan Zhang of thirty.

The thirty year old Zhu Yuan Zhang used knives and swords to compete for his world. The thirty year old Zhu Di used his restraint to plot his own future.

Zhu Di was like a good gymnast, who saved all those flashy and unnecessary movements and put all of his energy into the last tumble, for the championship reward, the throne.

Certainly, the Zhu Di of the time didn't have enough strength to achieve that. The most important job for now was to tally the number of prisoners and then go back to report the result.

It seemed that Heaven especially intended to glorify Zhu Di's deeds. The Prince of Jin, who went out at the same time, was a coward. He never entered inside the Mongol territory. In today's words, he didn't enter the enemy's house. He just fired couple of shots, howled couple of times, and then came back.

With the help of the good-for-nothing brother, instantly Zhu Di became the focal point of the people. Everyone took him as the hero of the people. Zhu Yuan Zhang was also very happy. He rewarded Zhu Di with a check, an imperial note of one million ingots.

Actually the reward was not that generous. As we have explained previously, the paper currency issued in the years of Martial Splendor was not backed by gold. Perhaps even before seeing Zhu Di, Zhu Yuan Zhang already had someone prepared the paper and printed the number one million on it. He was the emperor, he could write any number he wanted.

If Zhu Di was smart, he should have cashed the check earlier. Be it cashed for grain or textile, anyway, better do it before the check became toilet paper.

These were all unimportant. The key was that by this successful performance Zhu Di showed his value to Zhu Yuan Zhang and obtained the trust of Zhu Yuan Zhang. In fact it wouldn't have mattered if he did well or poorly, at least he got his name recognition.

But what brought to Zhu Di from this performance was just about that. No one thought he would become the successor to the throne. He also knew well that regardless how he performed, the most he did was to become a supporting character from an extra. To become the main character, he needed Zhu Yuan Zhang's consent. But obviously, Director Zhu didn't intend to change the role.

If it continued just like that, the ambitious Zhu Di would probably in the end become a good brother of Zhu Biao's and a guardian of the country's borders. His ability would be utilized for the benefit of the country. His ambition would be buried forever with the passing time.

It seemed that matters would be settled. When in year twenty five of Martial Splendor (AD 1392), the death of Crown Prince Zhu Biao changed everything.

Zhu Biao died. The position for the leading role became vacant. Time has come!

Zhu Yun Wen, the son of Zhu Biao, is nothing more than just an inexperienced and naïve youth. How is such a person going to be able to bear the important task of developing the empire? He should be replaced. There should be something like an open test and competition.

Step back a little, if there is no open competition, there should be at least a chance for a lottery. Oh, dad, you can't be so dictatorial anymore. It's time for some democracy.

Zhu Di once had a great expectation. He believed that as long as there is open competition, he would have the edge. What does the little kid know? If it's about handling state affairs and leading troops into combats, who can best me! Of course, the Prince of Ning is also a good fighter. But he is just a military man. How can a sinewy woodenhead be a successor to the throne?

Except me, who else!

But unexpectedly, Zhu Yuan Zhang's deep affection to Zhu Biao made him operate in a black box again. He really named the fifteen year old Zhu Yun Wen as the crown prince.

All is in vain, really in vain.

Waiting for the opportunity to come

Although Zhu Biao is gentle and soft, he is my brother after all. The eldest brother is like a father, I'm ok with that. Indeed he started work earlier than me. But that fifteen year old kid even dares to ride roughshod over me. I don't get it no matter what. I can't allow that to happen!

But this is the reality. Once father dies, the little kid will become the successor to the throne of the empire. When that time comes, even if I'm not willing, I have to kneel down before this person and swear a loyalty oath. What does he know? He has neither combat results nor administrative accomplishments. On what basis can he be an emperor?

The most painful thing in one's life is not about there will be a tragic ending, but about the inability to change it when the ending is already known.

If the Zhu Di of earlier was just complaining, then the Zhu Di after Zhu Yun Wen acceded to the throne was truly prepared to plot an insurrection. In legal terms, this is a process from wanting to commit crimes to preparing to commit crimes.

Zhu Di might be discontent, but he had to obey. In year twenty nine of Martial Splendor (AD 1396), the Great Grandfather of Ming decided to launch another expedition against Northern Yuan. The commander-in-chief was again Zhu Di. This would also be the last time in his life that Zhu Yuan Zhang made a battle plan.

He was veritably old. The energetic gallantry and galloping on horseback had become memories. But he still had a clear mind. He needed to have all matters settled before he died to keep the great empire of Ming last and forever strong and prosperous. Domestic problems had

been resolved. But his outstanding military intuition told him that Northern Yuan was still the strongest enemy of the country. The neighbor must be uprooted!

And Zhu Di matter-of-factly became the commander-in-chief. Although he didn't want to do this kind of job, after all he was only an employee, who got paid monthly. Going out to fight was to work to perform his duty. If he did well, it was his boss's achievement. If he didn't do well, he bore the responsibility. Who would want to do this kind of job?

But Zhu Yuan Zhang, the boss who would soon retire was not someone with whom someone could argue. Why did you do so well last time? Now it must be you! Do it, like it or not!

In March of the same year, Zhu Di set out from Beiping with mixed feelings. This time his strategy was basically the same as last time. After the army arrived at Daning, he first sent out cavalry to reconnoiter the location of the Yuan forces. After the Yuan forces were located. He led his forces through hills and valleys and found the Yuan forces in Mt. Checher. This time he didn't play the game of being nice and tolerant. He fought and drove the Northern Yuan forces off for hundreds of lis and captured Northern Yuan's General Solin Temur and others.

With assignment accomplished, it would be time to go home. The devastated Northern Yuan brothers were also waiting from afar. The war is over. Men are killed. Tents are burnt. Will you grace go back? Once you are gone, we will rebuild. But this time Zhu Di seemed to be irascible and Northern Yuan became the target of his wrath. He chased for hundreds of lis all the way to the City of Ulanhatu and defeated Northern Yuan's General Hachu. With that, he triumphantly went home.

No one should mess with a sulky man.

Zhu Di was victorious and went back home. But he was not as excited as before, which was understandable. But Zhu Yuan Zhang felt very differently. In his view, the country got one more good general and Zhu Yun Wen had a good uncle that could be depended on. Of course this was just his own idea.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's end

Zhu Yuan Zhang now really had a sense of relief. He had fought all his life and busy on the affairs of the country. Not only did he do his own work, but also the parts that belonged to his sons and grandsons.

Now the Great Ming Dynasty was rejuvenated and lively. People were settled and happy. Commerce flourished, Korea submitted to the Great Ming, and Northern Yuan was reduced to a guerrilla force. Zhu Yuan Zhang was extra cocky in the policies he created. In his mind, his

descendants needed only elementary ability to follow his policies to rule the Great Ming and ensure perpetual peace.

Everything is in its place. Now I can depart with a peace of mind.

To officials, Zhu Yuan Zhang was not a good monarch. But to his descendants, Zhu Yuan Zhang was a good father and grandfather. In truth the reason behind Zhu Yuan Zhang's contrary behaviors was simple. Just like parents, especially those who had suffered hunger before, of a single child, they couldn't bear the thought that their children should undergo the same suffering. They would, if they could, be in their children's place to undertake any suffering that might occur in the future.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was a genuinely good father. He desired that his sons and grandsons would be united to support Zhu Yun Wen, the successor he had chosen. But just like the contemporary so-called "generation gap", his sons and grandsons had their own plans. Especially those royal children, they couldn't understand the deep fatherly love from Zhu Yuan Zhang. In their minds, the old and white haired man was one who long ago should have retired to live on his pensions. All they cared was the chair in which the old man was sitting.

Zhu Yuan Zhang travailed all his life and accumulated huge quantities of wealth for his children. But at the end of his life, his children's eyes were only on the wealth at his hand and to the old man himself, there were only the cold stares.

This, undoubtedly, was the greatest tragedy in Zhu Yuan Zhang's life.

It's time for us to give Zhu Yuan Zhang a fair grading.

Zhu Yuan Zhang was born in a world of unrests. Laden with the misery of losing both parents, he rose up as a poor peasant. He wasn't of a noble birth, he didn't have support, and he had no one to rely on. Everything he got was obtained by his own struggle. He went through toils and tribulations, buried the bodies of his comrades, pushed forward, and continued the fight.

In Zhu Yuan Zhang's time there were numerous formidable characters. Chen You Liang, Zhang Shi Cheng, and Wang Bao Bao were all men difficult to reckon with. Relying on his amazing military talents, Zhu Yuan Zhang defeated these enemies. It should be fair to say that in that era, the best commander-in-chief was no one else but Zhu Yuan Zhang.

With his courage and determination, riding on a horseback he built a mammoth empire using his bare hands holding a sword.

Sure, who would have thought the ragged beggar in dozens of years ago would become the ruler of a great empire.

Sure, there was really no God of Fortune, who would also not have given a golden sword

and a golden key to a beggar. In those desperate days, no one would sympathize with and pity this man. Everything he had was gotten by his own effort.

He showed us that with a strong will and resolution, one would be able to overcome all obstacles.

He showed us that the most powerful weapon one has is unwavering belief and an undaunted courage.

When Zhu Yuan Zhang looked back at his dozens of years of tribulation and reviewed the great country he had created by himself, he had all the reasons to be proud of himself!

I am Zhu Yuan Zhang, the creator of the World of Great Ming!

More than six hundred years have gone by, but the controversies shrouded on Zhu Yuan Zhang are showing no sign of ending. He achieved everlasting deeds and also made serious mistakes. The controversies may not stop even in another six hundred years.

Zhu Yuan Zhang, you were who you were. Ground by time and eroded by ages, you still stood there. Your magnificent achievements, triumphs and defeats, gains and losses had all been recorded and provided for posterity to judge.

Teeming with heroes, the world was once as beautiful as pictures!

Dust at the equestrian field at suburb of the capital

This was originally a large swath of farm field. It was appropriated in a government appropriation. Grass was planted and it became the imperial equestrian field.

Zhu Yuan Zhang stood in the land that belonged to him. Years of fighting on horsebacks kept him ardently interested in the equestrian sport. He could never forget those times when he galloped on horses.

Time hastens men!

The energetic youths of the past had aged and gone. Comrades and friends of those times had all disappeared.

Looking back at my life, what have I got and what have I lost?

To create the great empire, he devoted his life and energy, he sacrificed his loved ones, friends, and subordinates, he killed many people, and he did many wrong things. Now he was at the final destination.

A lonely old man attending a mammoth empire was the final outcome.

He mounted on the horse again. Although his body was no longer fit for riding and had

lost the drive of old years, when he was on a horse and snapping the whip, a familiar sensation arose. Yes, everything has come back:

In the Temple of Imperial Awakening,
The moon was the companion,
And the solitary lamp darted.
In the City of Haozhou,
Minute details were tended with great attention,
Strive to become powerful all out efforts were devoted.

On the shore of Lake Poyang,
Blue waves undulated into the distance,
To the sky conflagrations elevated.
In the vast desert,
There were ironclad horses and flashing spears,
In the sand and dust swords pirouetted!

Founding an empire,
Eternal and universal rules were made,
To ensure that posterity would be exalted!

He rode and galloped. Mountains and rivers were trampled by him. The beautiful land was on his trail.

Images appeared in front him one by one: Guo Zi Xing, Empress Ma, Chen You Liang, Xu Da, Chang Yu Chun, Wang Bao Bao, Hu Wei Yong, and Lan Yu. Some of them he loved, some of them he hated, some of them he trusted, some of them he betrayed, some of them were his friends, and some of them were his enemies.

Life has been fulfilled, fulfilled!

Young and poor, yet I was ambitious,
Bloody and violent, yet I was courageous!
I am masculine and militant, and the Great Ming forceful!
I am masculine and militant, and the Country powerful!

He reined in his horse. Facing the setting sun and the last ray of sun light, he gave a last glance to the beautiful land and laughed out loud to the sky:

I was just a plain clothed man from Huai West, why did Heaven award the World to me!

In year thirty one of Martial Splendor (AD 1398), Zhu Yuan Zhang, the Great Grandfather of Ming, collapsed. He was seventy one.

Book of Zhu Yun Wen

Chapter Twenty Four

Emperor Establishing Civility

Worries of Emperor Establishing Civility

Before dying from illness, Zhu Yuan Zhang designated the royal grandson Zhu Yun Wen as his successor. Zhu Yuan Zhang was peaceful at his death because he thought Zhu Yun Wen would be able to continue his will and make the Great Ming better. The man left with peace in his mind. But he left behind a man whose mind was full of anxiety.

Zhu Yuan Zhang's great shadow over Zhu Yun Wen disappeared and he finally was able to handle the state affairs independently. But the twenty one year old surprisingly discovered he still couldn't see the sun, because the shadow of nine other men was over him again.

These nine men were the nine sons of Zhu Yuan Zhang. From northeast to the northwest, they were the Princes of Liao, Ning, Yan, Gu, Dai, Jin, Qin, Qing, and Su.

If the emperor could be said as the largest landlord, then the nine men were the militia forces that protected the great landlord.

Zhu Yuan Zhang conferred twenty four sons and one grandson as princes. These unique men were called the guardian princes, who had their own governments and armies. There were three guards for each prince. But please note, the three guards were not three men.

A guard was a collective name. Each guard numbered from three thousand to nineteen thousand men. In this way, the strength of the guardian princes can be tallied.

The key to the statement above is that the numbers were different. By this rule, the forces controlled by a guardian prince numbered from nine thousand to fifty seven thousand. But in practice, the guardian princes all included the later number. Power rested in forces. Even if one didn't want the power, it would be better to keep a few more hitmen and body guards to safeguard the house.

The number was not big. A mere fifty thousand was certainly no match against the central government. Zhu Yuan Zhang considered this when he created the military system. But things usually went astray when there were exceptions.

The few exceptions were some of the nine mentioned above. They were exceptions because they had more onerous responsibilities, to man the border.

We have described their areas of defense. The nine landlord forces were like nine military districts, which were responsible for different assignments. Among them, the Princes of Yan and Jin had the most strength and each had forces of more than a hundred thousand. They were considered very powerful. But the two were not the most audacious among the princes. Putatively the feistiest fighter was the Prince of Ning, who had "eighty thousand armored men and six thousand chariots", which didn't seem to be as strong as the Princes of Yan and Jin. But under him there was a force that was the most powerful at the time, Duoyan's Guards.

This was a unique force, which could be described as Ming's Foreign Legion, which consisted of all Mongols. They had exceptional combat ability. Many may ask, why were the Mongols so willingly to work for Ming?

In fact the answer was very simple. Ming paid them regularly. After being fed, the foreign recruits also had leisure time to spend at entertainment venues. But Northern Yuan often paid them with IOUs. Before a battle they were promised to keep the spoils, but afterward they had to submit their plunders to the authorities and they could only keep what remained.

This was obviously an unprofitable business, in which someone risked his life to earn some plunders, yet he had to give them to the public. If he died perhaps no one would take care of his body. Indeed it was not as good as working as a civil servant for Ming. They would get paid every month and there were also other benefits. Numerous Mongols were lured over this way.

Before interests, it was hard to remain loyal.

In addition, the Prince of Ning himself was also a dare devil. It was said in every battle he led the charges, just like Rambo in *First Blood*. He killed without blinking, chopped heads like cutting vegetables. Even a vicious personality like the Prince of Yan would have somewhat yielded to him.

The landlord forces guarding the boarder also conducted joint military exercises from time to time. It often involved hundreds of thousands of men brandishing their knives and spears in loud battle cries. If there were such events, the Northern Yuan guerilla would immediately went underground.

Actually the cries disturbed not only Northern Yuan, but also Zhu Yun Wen, the one sitting in the throne. To him, these were a kind of like flexing the muscle.

Something must be done.

Zhu Yun Wen was a good man. When he was fifteen, his father Zhu Biao fell gravely ill

and he did all he could to care for him. His filial affection didn't move Heaven to save Zhu Biao's life. After Zhu Biao's death, Zhu Yun Wen took his three younger brothers to live together with him. He had a simple purpose. He didn't want the young brothers to suffer the same misery of one losing his father. He knew what they needed was love.

That year, he was only fifteen.

In addition, he also took on the job of caring for Zhu Yuan Zhang. Because Zhu Yuan Zhang had a bad temper, the ones who cared for him always worried about losing their heads. Zhu Yun Wen voluntarily took the responsibility. He tended Zhu Yuan Zhang personally until he left this world. He fulfilled his duty as a good son and good grandson.

He was also a precocious child. Certainly what made him mature early was not only his father's early death, but also his uncles.

There were two events that were always fresh on Zhu Yun Wen's mind:

Once, teacher Zhu Yuan Zhang posed the left part of a couplet[127]: "The wind blows the horse tail into hundreds of threads." He asked his students to match with the right part. There were only two students, one was the model student Zhu Yun Wen and the other was the young street loiterer Zhu Di.

Zhu Yun Wen replied first and his answer, "The rain pelts the goat hair emitting smells of mutton", although barely matched, it was not that elegant. But now the street loiterer Zhu Di suddenly became ingeniously brilliant, he immediately replied in eloquence: "The sun brightens the dragon scales into thousands of gemstones."

The reply not only kept its uniformity with the left part, it also called out the word 'dragon'. It was indeed an unmatchable pairing. Zhu Yuan Zhang was very happy and praised Zhu Di, who lost no time to glance at Zhu Yun Wen, as if to say, this is probably all you can do.

Although Zhu Yun Wen was young, he understood the meaning of that look.

The other encounter was more serious. After school, Zhu Yun Wen ran into the street loiterer Zhu Di, who saw that no one was around them and his gangster-like demeanor was on display. He patted the back of him and said: "Who would have thought you are who you are today."

This kind of behavior was thought imprudent in an imperial society. It's like now some bad teenagers stalking students outside the school gate to rob them.

[127] This is a special form of artistic word play on the Chinese words. A couplet consists of two parts, both parts must have the exact same number of words and at the same location, the two words from each part must have the identical or opposite meaning. More stringent couplets require the tunes to also follow certain rules. Because Chinese was written vertically from left to right, thus the two parts are the left and right parts. Optionally there can also be a horizontally written shorter header, which is not required here. The header and the couplets were often used to decorate the gate of a house or compound.

Zhu Yun Wen didn't expect Zhu Di would be so rude. He didn't know how to react. Just at this moment, Teacher Zhu Yuan Zhang appeared. He saw what happened and was enraged. He bitterly scolded Zhu Di. But Zhu Yun Wen's reaction was rather interesting.

Not only didn't he lay accusations against him he also defended him by saying that was just a prank between the uncle and his nephew. Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't pursue the matter.

You have to admire Zhu Yun Wen's quick wit, which was a talent of the royal sons and grandsons developed in the environment of imperial court. But to us, this kind of talent was more of a disconsolate nature.

In Zhu Yuan Zhang's eyes, Zhu Di was a good son. But in Zhu Yun Wen's eyes, Zhu Di was a bad uncle. There was no contradiction here. Just like what we have seen before, Zhu Di had two faces. One was for his father and one was for as nephew.

Under this circumstance, there was that famous conversation recorded in history.

After fixing the problem of good bows and running dogs, Zhu Yuan Zhang once proudly said to Zhu Yun Wen: "I've got several of your uncles to guard the borders and look after for you, now you should be at peace to rule as an emperor."

Zhu Yuan Zhang smiled but Zhu Yun Wen didn't. Unlike before, when he would have concurred, he now sank into deep thoughts.

This is an opportunity. If I've got anything to say, sooner or later I have to say it. Now this is the chance to say it.

Zhu Yun Wen raised his head and in a worrisome tone uttered something totally unexpected by Zhu Yuan Zhang: "If foreign forces invade us, my uncles will repel them. But what if my uncles have different ideas, how should I deal with them?"

Having strategized his entire life, Zhu Yuan Zhang was stunned by this question. Don't I even trust my own sons? He mulled for a long time and said something also totally unexpected by Zhu Yun Wen: "What do you mean?"

This time it was Zhu Yun Wen's turn to be stunned. The ball was back to his court. "If I had the answer would I have asked you?" The grandfather and grandson were deeply troubled by this question. But sometimes a question must be answered. After some pondering, Zhu Yun Wen, like writing a thesis, enumerated five points to answer this question: "First, I'm going to employ morality to win over their hearts. Then I'll use decorum to restrain their conducts. If those don't work, I'll reduce their territories. The next step will be to relocate them. In the end if nothing works, I'll have to resort to force."

Being skilled at strategies and tactics for all his life, after hearing this plan, Zhu Yuan Zhang had to admit: "Very good, there doesn't seem to be a better way."

Zhu Yuan Zhang was very happy. His intuition told him the strategy laid out by Zhu Yun Wen would surely solve the latent worry. But could things be really as easy as he thought, could there be any loopholes?

In reality there was indeed a loophole. Today, we review this classical conversation and can see that what was uttered by both men were reasonable. There was no error in Zhu Yuan Zhang's assessment, in deed there was no better way than what was said by Zhu Yun Wen. But he missed one key factor, Zhu Yun Wen's ability.

Zhu Yun Wen was a smart child. According to history record, Zhu Yuan Zhang at first didn't like him because he didn't have a well formed head. But later Zhu Yuan Zhang gradually discovered that the child was very smart and was very good at reciting books. Thus he had a fresh set of eyes on him and eventually designated him as the successor.

We have to say something about a person's ability. When I was a child, there was a boy in my neighborhood. He was able to buy soy sauce when he was only five and he was really good at bargaining. People were amazed because he was always able to save a dime every time he bought soy sauce. He was hailed as a genius. More than a dozen years later, by chance I heard he was unemployed at home and couldn't find a job. But he still went to buy soy sauce. The only difference was that the keeper of the convenient store would no longer bargain with him anymore.

Buying soy sauce is just an example. The main point here is that the ability to recite books and the ability to handle problems are different. If someone is good at learning, it doesn't mean he is good at dealing with matters. If someone is good at planning, it doesn't mean he is capable of executing the plan.

In fact Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't toss the sophisticated problem to the inexperienced grandson. He left some men to Zhu Yun Wen to help him to rule. Among them, three were the main members, who later became the core of the cabinet of Emperor Establishing Civility.

The first man

In one of the years of Martial Splendor, Zhu Yuan Zhang, in a secretive manner, once told Zhu Yun Wen, who had been designated as the successor, that he had picked a man who would be capable of running the country. But the man had a shortcoming, he was too proud. Thus he couldn't be used now. He had to be restrained so that in the future he would be able to accomplish big tasks. Then he uttered the name of the man: Fang Xiao Ru.

Everyone should learn from Zhu Yuan Zhang's words. An average boss will also want to degrade you before promoting you. The so-called honing was originated this way. Never

lament to your boss on this, otherwise you may really be perpetually oppressed.

Ironically, this Fang Xiao Ru was the son of Fang Ke Qin, who was wrongly executed in the case of empty seals. Kill one's father but still use him, would this be considered as an oppressive measure to Fang Xiao Ru?

Fang Xiao Ru was very well versed in the classics and well known. His teacher was the famous Song Lian. He also considered it was his job to ensure that "the Tao of princely rule is manifested and peace is achieved." But confusing to him, despite being famous and his teacher was an official in the imperial court, he was never put to use despite he was twice recommended by the local government in year fifteen and twenty five of Martial Splendor.

We know the reason but Fang Xiao Ru at the time didn't know the reason. Thus he waited for ten years. From this we can see the thoughts of a boss can never be ascertained and speculated.

Zhu Yuan Zhang told Zhu Yun Wen that Fang Xiao Ru was absolutely trustworthy. "He will be loyal to you for all his life, run the country for you, and create a peaceful and prosperous world."

He was only half right.

The second man

In one of the years of Martial Splendor, the Hall of Prudence in the capital city was struck by lightning because it didn't have a lightning rod installed. If this happened today, all that needed would be to have some sort of propaganda on safety and educate the people to monitor the changes in weather, fix the hall, and that will be it. But in those years, this was an event of unimaginable magnitude. Zhu Yuan Zhang thought Heaven was angry. He decided to pay tribute and pray in the Temple of Worship. He probably thought he indeed did many wrong things, thus for this ceremony he selected some people to go together with him.

The condition for being selected was very stringent. Only men who hadn't made any mistakes in nine years were selected. In the era of Martial Splendor it was impossibly hard. In those years, it would be lucky for an official to have his head kept. Even if you didn't do anything wrong, Mr. Zhu could have found something. On this ground, those who met the requirements would indeed need to be truly virtuous, at least virtuous to Mr. Zhu.

Although there weren't many, there were a few. Among them, Qi De was one. For this reason he was noticed by Zhu Yuan Zhang and kept in his mind. After the ceremony, Zhu Yuan Zhang changed Qi De's name to Qi Tai, which became his moniker for the rest of his life.

The man was a civilian, but he was appointed left deputy minister of war although he

never commanded troops. Zhu Yuan Zhang was also nervous about this. So he conducted a one on one interview. He asked about the names of the frontier generals. Qi Tai was not nervous at all. He named the generals from the east to the west and from south to the north and he didn't miss a single one. He got a perfect score. Afterwards, he was asked about the terrains of the regions. Qi Tai didn't talk this time, he produced a booklet from his sleeves and in it everything was carefully recorded in detail. Zhu Yuan Zhang was very surprised and appreciated it.

It must be pointed out that this interview was not prearranged. Qi Tai didn't prepare ahead. This shows the fellow was indeed using the thing as a book to recite. He even summarized it into a booklet and carried it with him everywhere. Such enthusiasm out did those fourth grade students who practice memorizing English words on a bus.

He too, would become an important official to Emperor Establishing Civility.

The third man

This man was rather unique. He was a diehard follower of Zhu Yun Wen when he entered the imperial court as an official. He was Huang Zi Cheng.

Huang Zi Cheng was a Jiangxi native. In year eighteen of Martial Splendor, out of obscurity, he surprised the world when he scored the highest and was awarded the title of top general appointee. Later he was chosen as the study companion in the East Palace. This was a job of great expectations because the crown prince was the future emperor. The fact that he got the job manifested the high degree of his academic achievement.

When Zhu Yun Wen was the crown grandson of the emperor, he was always with him. One incident even more deepened the affection between him and Zhu Yun Wen.

Once, Zhu Yun Wen was moaning outside of the east tower gate when he was seen by Huang Zi Cheng, who was passing by. He came up to him and inquired for the reason. Zhu Yuan Wen, considering he was his man, told him the truth. He worried about his uncles. What to do if they would rebel? Upon hearing this, Huang Zi Cheng sneered and told Zhu Yun Wen not to worry. He said: "The forces of the princes at most can only be used to protect themselves. If they dare to rebel, the Court will send troops to attack them and they will be vanquished!" Then he used the story of the Crisis of the Seven Principalities during the reign of Esteemed Emperor of Han in the Han Dynasty[128] to encourage Zhu Yun Wen. He stated if the government sent out troops, rebellions will be suppressed.

[128] The Esteemed Emperor of Han was the fourth emperor of the Han Dynasty. During his reign, the princes of seven states rouse up against him, which was quickly put down.

After hearing these words, Zhu Yun Wen felt greatly relieved. He took these words to his heart and thanked Huang Zi Cheng for laying out a bright future for him.

This was another example of using history as references without considering the present reality. Where was Zhou Ya Fu?[129] Would you, Huang Zi Cheng, be able to command troops to fight?

In summary, the three men shared a common trait. They were all well-read scholars. They all were ambitious bookmen.

"Countries are let down by bookmen." It's not just a fiction!

After Emperor Establishing Civility acceded to the throne, he immediately recalled Fang Xiao Ru and appointed him the assistant professor of the Imperial Academy. He promoted Qi Tai to minister of war and Huang Zi Cheng to scholar of the Imperial Academy. The three scholars thus formed the brain trust of the emperor.

After Zhu Yun Wen became the emperor, he summoned Huang Zi Cheng and asked him a question: "Sir, do you still remember what you said outside of the east tower gate?"

Huang Zi Cheng solemnly replied: "I never dare to forget!"

Then do it. Sooner or later Zhu Di is going to revolt. Better to do it early, worse to do it later. I can't be wrong. He is destined to revolt!

[129] Zhou Ya Fu was the general who put down the Rebellion of the Seven Principalities in Han Dynasty.

Chapter Twenty Five

Zhu Di in Waiting

Zhu Di's dilemma

Zhu Di actually didn't want to rebel. He wanted to be an emperor, but he didn't want to rebel.

This seems to be a contradictory assertion. But in fact there is no contradiction. Based on the relationship between rights and duties, wanting to be an emperor is a right, but to rebel is a duty. To those who were born out of the wrong womb or born late, if they wanted to enjoy their rights, they had to perform their duties.

In terms of economics, the cost of rebellion was too high and it would be easy to lose everything. Based on previous data, the end of those who lost everything was death. One can believe Zhu Di read history books before moving on to rebellion. Throughout history, including the small dynasties like Sixteen States of Five Nomadic Peoples[130] and Five Dynasties and Ten States[131], the number of princes who rebelled and succeeded could be tallied by counting fingers, it wouldn't be necessary to use toes.

If the scope could be narrowed to count only the major dynasties like Ming, Zhu Di would be pleasantly surprised that up to now the record was zero. Zhu Di wasn't so confident about breaking the record. If someone came to Zhu Di and asked for money from him in exchange to allow him to rebel and even if the rebellion failed, he only had to repay the money, then Zhu would furnish the money even if he had to get a loan from a bank.

Unfortunately there wasn't such kind of chance in this world and there wasn't a backer of such kind. To Zhu Di, the cost to rebel was too great. For the erstwhile Zhu Double Eight, he had only a wretched life, he lost both parents, he had nothing, his full attention was only on feeding himself, he didn't have a decent job, and he didn't have money in a bank. He would be

[130] This was the period after the collapse of the Han and before the Tang when China was divided by many small states. This was about from the 3rd to 5th century.
[131] After Tang collapsed and before the founding of Song, China was divided again into smaller states. This was during about most of the 10th century.

an ideal rebel. But even for him, in that kind of situation, before deciding to rebel, he had to ponder and couldn't make up his mind.

Zhu Di was very different. He was born into a royal family. He had his house, wives, and children. He had hundreds of thousands of men under him taking orders from him. There was every form of entertainment and other leisure activities in the palace of a prince. If he wanted to find something exciting to do, he could go out and turn left to find his neighbor, the Mongols, with whom he could fight to whet his appetite. But if he rebelled and failed, he would lose his house, his women, his children, and his subordinates. He would certainly also not be able to keep his dear life.

It really had to be considered carefully to be in such a business.

Once he was on the way, there would be no return.

Then, a man disrupted Zhu Di's hesitation and also changed his life.

While Zhu Di was still pondering, Huang Zi Cheng and Qi Tai, two of the emperor's key officials, had already started to prepare for action. Ironically, although both men were scholars, they thought and acted like men of significance. They talked about the princes and spoke about eliminating this one today or getting rid of the other one tomorrow. Very soon disputes arose. What made things worse was that both were egotistical men. One proclaimed that he was learned and capable of strategic thinking. The other one thought of himself as exceptional in strategies and tactics. Both despised each other.

Actually they didn't have to argue with each other because at the time the number one strategist in the world was another man. Even more unfortunate to them, the man was their enemy and also the one that changed Zhu Di's life.

Another monk

In year eighteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1385), Zhu Yuan Zhang selected ten monks from among the populous, intending to assign them to the princes to preach sutra and offer blessings. To these monks, who were really not about just practicing religion, being with which prince was a matter of importance. Before the guardian princes came, the monks gossiped about which one was richer, which one was more powerful, and which locale was better and the land was rich.

Only a monk named Dao Yan remained stoic. He seemed didn't mind about these things. But in fact he was more excited than anyone else, because he had been waiting for the moment and the man for a long time.

Soon the princes entered and the clattering monks quieted down. They knew that the

moment that would decide their fortune had come.

Dao Yan glanced at the man that he had been waiting for. He is finally here!

Zhu Di, wearing a smile typical of him, walked onward. He didn't notice Dao Yan. While he was passing by, the quiet monk suddenly opened his mouth: "Your Highness the Prince of Yan, your humbled monk would like to be with you."

Zhu Di was startled. He turned back and looked at the monk, who recommended himself. With a smile, he asked a question that would seem to be all necessary: "Why?"

"Your humbled monk has a big present for you."

Now Zhu Di became really interested, I am a noble prince and I can have whatever I want. What kind of present a poor monk can give me?

"Oh, what present?"

This is it. I can't hesitate anymore. This present will surely move him! "If Your Highness will use me, your humbled monk would like to offer a white hat to you, the great prince!"

Upon hearing these words, the expression on Zhu Di's face immediately changed. Although he didn't read much, he knew full well what it meant by putting the word white on top of the word prince[132]. He walked fast to Dao Yan and reproached him in an angry and low voice: "Who are you, don't you want to die?!"

But Dao Yan smiled and uttered nothing as if he didn't hear it. He closed his eyes and started to meditate.

The lure is too great. He WILL come back to me.

Surely enough, after a moment, a low voice sounded to his ears: "Follow me."

A smile crept onto his face. The era that belongs to me has arrived. I'll turn the world completely upside down!

A man of tumultuous times

In the world there are many people, who are engaged in different professions. They are farmers who farm the lands, merchants who trade goods, craftsmen who repair things, and they are all the ones that belong to this world. But some others were not willingly in their practices. They chose another vocation, study.

From books written by the sages to books on how to govern, there were no books that they wouldn't study. From these books, they grasped certain essence and patterns, which enabled

[132] The Chinese character for emperor is a combination of the character white on top of the character prince.

them to view the world in more reasonable and objective ways. Also, the imperial examination system created an important channel for people to enter the bureaucracies by studying. Thus many scholars, through this channel, became court officials of the emperors and helped them to run the country.

Among these officials, some of the best ones, relying on their own abilities, became the elites among the elites. They were more accurate in assessing issues and knew how to seize on the opportunities to better solve problems. We call these men capable officials.

The so-called capable officials were not necessarily virtuous or loyal officials. Some of them were treacherous officials. The term is used to describe only the capability of a man, without referring to his conduct.

These men were the true elites. But they could further be classified into three types according to their numbers and their uses.

Men of first type were called men of good governance. These men could be found in almost every dynasty. They were the experts in the words of the saints and conducts of the virtuous. They shared the common characteristic that they were better at sorting out the affairs of the state. If an emperor had men of this kind, he would be able to create an era of peace and prosperity. Many of them were well known, for example, Yao Chong and Song Jing of the Tang Dynasty. Men of this type were not uncommon. They were the builders.

Men of second kind were called men of bad governance. They were not the so-called treacherous officials. They were trouble makers. They were good at conspiracies, cabals, and intrigues. They were well versed in the *Art of the Thick and Black*. Unlike men of first type, they usually had been at the lowest rungs of society for years and through many tumults. They had very clear understandings of the dark side of the society. They were energetic and influential and they usually were able to ruin a great dynasty. Among them, the notable one was An Lu Shan[133]. Men of this type were not common. They were destroyers.

Men of the third type were called men of rescues. They were of rare kinds. Their rate of reproduction and survival was lower than that of pandas. Usually one appeared only once a hundred years. These men had traits of men of both above types. They studied both teachings of Confucius and Mencius as well as cabals and intrigues. They were able to adroitly utilize various methods to rule the country. They were also able to use their own ability to extend the life of a declining dynasty. Among them, the notable one was Zhang Ju Zheng. They were very rare. They were preservers.

And this Dao Yan was a typical man of bad governance.

[133] An Lu Shan was a mid-Tang senior official, who later started a rebellion, which was put down. After that, Tang declined.

He was really not a professional monk. Before he became one, he was well read on the classics and had been through hard times. He was ambitious but couldn't find a place where he would be able to serve his country. His name was Yao Guang Xiao.

Yao Guang Xiao

Yao Guang Xiao was a native of Changzhou (present day Wuxian of Jiangsu). He was born in year fifteen of Utmost Justice and was only seven years younger than Zhu Yuan Zhang. Born into a tumultuous world, since very young he had been keen on studying. He was good at poetry and painting. He became a monk when he was fourteen and acquired the name Dao Yan. He liked socializing with people. He maintained good relationships with some of the famous people of the time like Yang Ji and Song Lian.

But he was not studying the *Idealistic Philosophy of Cheng and Zhu*[134] and ways of means of good governance. Actually there was not much use for a monk to study these theories. But surprisingly, he also didn't study Buddhism. More surprisingly, he took a Taoist as his teacher, although he was a Buddhist monk! It's really unheard of that one could practice internationalism in religion.

His Taoist teacher was also not a simple man. His name was Xi Ying Zhen. He was also a strange man. He was a Taoist but he wasn't into alchemy and Taoism, rather he was specialized in the Prophesiology of Yin and Yang[135].

The so-called Prophesiology of Yin and Yang had a very ancient origin. It encompasses many different things, including fortune-telling, divination, astrology, trickery, and machination. Contemporaries thought these doodads as hocus-pocus, and genteel men usually looked at them askance. But in truth, there were in-depth understanding and analysis to the social phenomenon in Prophesiology of Yin and Yang, which was the encapsulation and abstraction of the results of their forebears.

On the other hand, ones who studied these theories were usually not men in conventional professions, who wouldn't study these things because Prophesiology of Yin and Yang was not a subject of imperial examinations. But men who professed in these theories usually had the voracity of ambitions to swallow the world and the strategy to change dynasties. In current terms, they were the destabilizing factors of the society. In addition, studying these theories

[134] This was a school of thought developed by the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi of Song Dynasty based on Confucian ideology. There are more detailed introductions of this thought later in this book.

[135] There is no proper translation for 术数, which is basically an amalgamation of various future predicting practices that may include sorcery, divination, wizardry, prophesying, and other sorts of similar work. But the core act of these practices is about predicting the future and the difference is in the techniques and equipment used. Thus I am inventing a new word to describe this rather unique practice.

also helped to maintain a livelihood. If one failed in strategizing he would still be able to find employment again by opening a fortune-telling shop.

A Taoist who didn't practice alchemy, a Buddhist monk who didn't study Buddhism, and a theory of hocus-pocus, these were the environment in which Dao Yan grew up step by step. He became a practitioner of intrigues. He read many books and saw the world. He understood the ugliness of human spirits and acquired the skills of power struggles. More importantly, he wanted to achieve something.

This was the crux of the issue. Although he knew famous people and was skilled at military strategies, he didn't have the means to put his capabilities to use, for the subject of the exam was language arts, not the extracurricular stuff he learned. In addition, what he learned didn't seem to be useful in peace times. He had capabilities, which was of no use and no place to use. Thus for a long while, Dao Yan was in a depressed state.

Maybe in this life there wouldn't be a day when he would be able to show himself. He sank into a depression.

So instead of staying at home brooding, he went out travelling. If it was the travel of a monk, then the points of interests would be temples. He left his tracks in all the major temples in the country. When he travelled to the Temple of Mt Song, he met a man who left his mark in his whole life. This man ran a divination on Dao Yan, who himself was best at divination and his future and fate was accurately prophesized.

The man's name was Yuan Gong, who, unlike the armature fortune-teller Dao Yan, was a professional one, which was a profession that had had a long history. They were famous throughout history for the main reason that they usually were able to predict the future of a man dozens of years in advance, which was more accurate than even weather forecast. The celebrity effects also increased the mystery of these men. The most famous story was the appraisal on Cao Cao, who was prophesized to be a cunning hero of times of tumult.

Initially Yuan Gong didn't know Dao Yan. But upon meeting Dao Yan, he was greatly shocked. Just like the present day fortune-tellers on the streets, he ran up to Dao Yan and insisted on giving him a fortune-telling session (it was not known if he charged for it). In addition, he offered him an appraisal: "How could there be such a strange looking monk like you in this world! With pair of droopy eyes, you look like a sickened tiger. A man with your kind of look naturally savors killings. You will be a man like Liu Bing Zhong!"

If a fortune-teller on the streets offered you such kind of appraisal on you today, probably not only that you wouldn't pay him, you might also give him a good scolding. But Dao Yan's reaction was totally different. He was exuberant. Words such as droopy eyes and savory of

killings even elated Dao Yan. From this story it can be seen that this man was indeed a dangerous figure.

It's necessary to introduce Liu Bing Zhong. Who was he? Why did Dao Yan take him as his idol?

Liu Bing Zhong was also a monk. Putting together the later Zhu Double Eight and Dao Yan, being a monk at the time was a very risky profession. Many outlaws were found in them. Liu Bing Zhong was a man of the Yuan Dynasty. When Kublai was still a prince, he was identified as a talent and recruited by Kublai as a key advisor, who made critical contributions to propel Kublai to the imperial throne.

In taking a man of that ilk as an idol, it wouldn't be hard to speculate what Dao Yan wanted to do.

Dao Yan was not a man who could remain serene and without desires. In the era of Martial Splendor, Zhu Yuan Zhang once ordered the scholarly monks to take examinations at the Ministry of Rites. Seizing the civil servant test opportunity, Dao Yan also went to the test. It's not clear how well he did. Any way, he wasn't offered a position, which was very disappointing to him. He had to keep waiting.

Finally, he seized the opportunity in year fifteen of Martial Splendor (AD 1385). He followed the Prince of Yan to Beiping and became the priest of the Temple of Celebrating Longevity.

If he really did his duty as a priest, there wouldn't have been occurrences of so many things.

The monk who should have been reciting Buddhism verses was really not up to his job. The main domain of his activities was not the temple, but the palace of the prince. Day after day and year after year, he used the same proposition, rebellion, to urge Zhu Di.

Based on later history records, Dao Yan was not a man who desired office or wealth. Without seeking for fame and gains, it was rather strange for a man to keep things like rebellion on his lips and be anxious to stir up the world. What was his motive?

Ambition

Obviously, Dao Yan was a man of normal psychology. He wasn't a man who had nothing to do once he had himself fed. Rebellion was not a fun entertainment. Why was he so enthusiastic about it? If we analyze the experience of this man, the answer shouldn't be hard to find. What kept him going was one word, ambition.

Dao Yan was an abandoned man. He studied histories from ancient to present and was capable of strategies. But for various reasons he was not put to good use. In the year when Zhu Di took him back to Beiping, he was already fifty. Youth was gone forever. The flow of time added wrinkles to his face and also tried his soul. One after another wait and one after another dashed hope changed the man who should be enjoying his retirement to a powder cag, which would explode if the time was right and the fuse was properly set.

Zhu Di was the fuse and the era of changes was the time.

The emperor's actions

Huang Zi Cheng and Qi Tai were ready for action. But disputes arose between them on determining the targets. Qi Tai thought it was better to first take on the Prince of Yan. But Huang Zi Cheng rather thought they should first eliminate the other princes, who were the sidekicks of the Prince of Yan, whom would then be acted upon.

Now we look at the two plans and both seemed to be sound. Later historians usually thought Qi Tai's plan was the right one. But it seems to me that such kind of conclusion is suspicious of having been benefitted on the hindsight. There was some degree of soundness in Huang Zi Cheng's plan. After all, there was some advantage in picking on the weaker ones first.

This was a chess match that would decide the fate of the world. The two players were Zhu Yun Wen and Zhu Di. Presently Zhu Yun Wen, as an emperor, got the chance to go first, and on the chess board he made his first move.

Opening move

Zhu Su, the Prince of Zhou, was Zhu Di's brother from the same mother. In Zhu Yun Wen's view, he would be an able assistant to Zhu Di. For this very reason, he became the first one to be eliminated. The man who was tasked to execute this order was Li Jing Long, who was the son of Li Wen Zhong and has been mentioned many times before.

Although the fellow was not good at fighting, he had his ways in arresting people. He quickly summoned a large force to the Palace of the Prince of Zhou, whom, along with his wife and children, were all taken to the capital city. Zhu Yun Wen was not courteous to his uncle. He demoted him down to a commoner all the way from the top ranked government official. He was banished to Yunnan. At the time tourism was not fully developed in Yunnan, at best it was considered a place of half nascent desolate region. Thus the Prince of Zhou was sent to such a place to be the Tarzan the Ape Man.

Now it was merely one month after the emperor acceded to the throne. But apparently he didn't have the shyness and modesty of a new hire at a new workplace. He began to deal with his uncles. The Prince of Zhou was the first one but he was definitely not the last one. And the Prince of Zhou would soon discover that comparing to the fate of his successors, it wasn't necessarily a bad thing to become a tourist in Yunnan.

In December of the same year, someone accused the Prince of Dai being "cruel and brutal". The emperor exhibited a strong moral rectitude. He decisively applied the principle that royals would be equal under the law with the commoners. He sent his uncle to the Shu region and put him under surveillance.

In May of next year, the emperor once again showed his rectitude in not practicing nepotism. He accused Zhu Bian, the Prince of Min, of "illegal activities", arrested him, and demoted him to a commoner. To the end, the "illegal activities" were never fully explained. It would rival the infamous charge of "maybe so"[136]. In this sense, throughout history, there wouldn't need too many excuses to ruin someone.

Before everyone had the time to react, the emperor once again laid his hands on Zhu Bai, the Prince of Xiang, on charges of disrupting the monetary system that he printed paper money. In fact in that era there was no paper currency system worthy of mentioning. The one who arbitrarily printed the most money was the emperor himself. Of course this was just an excuse. Thus the imperial court sent envoys to go to Xiang to arrest him. They thought this time it would be just as easy as before. But something unexpected happened.

Zhu Bai, the Prince of Xiang, was worthy of being the son of Zhu Yuan Zhang. He was courageous. Upon hearing the news that people were sent to arrest him, he smiled and said to his subordinates: "I saw personally that many officials charged with crimes under the Great Grandfather didn't want to be subjected to insult and committed to suicide. I am the son of the Grand Emperor, how can I be humiliated by the lowly jailors just for staying alive".

He didn't open the gate to receive the envoys. Instead, he summoned all of his wives and children, locked the palace gates, and burned themselves to death.

A tragedy like this wasn't enough to impede the pace of the actions of the emperor. In actions as swift as lightening he successively arrested Zhu Fu, the Prince of Qi, and Zhu Gui, the Prince of Dai. Both were demoted to commoners.

It was clean and swift and without mercy! With such results, even an idiot would be able to figure out what the emperor was trying to do.

[136] This was a charge laid upon Yue Fei, a Southern Song general who led the fight against Mongol invaders, by the Southern Song's Prime Minister Qing Hui, upon being asked to explain a criminal charge against Yue Fei.

Many may be curious, why didn't the guardian princes resist? In fact the reason was simple. For one they didn't have the strength like the Prince of Yan. On the other hand and the more important reason was that they didn't have an excuse to resist.

In those eras, the emperor was the supreme ruler. All the guardian princes were his subjects. Not to mention if you were the uncle of the emperor, even if you were his grandfather, as long as he was the emperor, you had to obey him. In even more ugly terms, it was still considered lenient to have a principality abolished and the prince sent to banishment. It was considered proper for having left enough grace for them. If a guardian prince was disobedient and openly resisted, of course there would be knives and clubs waiting to be used to serve them.

By now, the emperor had completely violated the promise he made to Zhu Yuan Zhang. Things like subduing people with virtue were all thrown to beyond cloud nine. He was like a boxer just entering the ring. He threw a round of thunderous bastard punches, which seemed to be swift and sharp, but with limited efficacy.

This was a brutal political struggle and also a boxing match.

The naive Zhu Yun Wen didn't understand that the boxing match he was in was not an amateur match of just three rounds. It was a professional match of twelve rounds. In such matches, it was impossible to kill an old pro by just some random punches. The key to achieving victory lied in tolerant patience and accurate judgement.

Zhu Yun Wen got the chance to move first but he didn't get the first opportunity.

Zhu Di would react.

Chapter Twenty Six

Readying for Action

A contingency plan

The emperor was about to come to knock on his door, which was out of Zhu Di's control. He had to revolt or be eliminated like those of his brothers. For the moment Zhu Di was in a dire situation. He was no better even than the erstwhile Zhu Double Eight. If Zhu Double Eight didn't revolt, he still would be able to get out of the temple and become a vagabond for a living. But Zhu Di didn't have that kind of luxury. The world was Zhu Yun Wen's, to where could he escape?

Dao Yan seized the opportunity presented by the moment and continued selling his rebellion theory to Zhu Di, who was already very accustomed to this. If there was one day on which the fellow didn't utter those rebellious words, it would be an abnormal day. In the past Zhu Di could just brush these words off because he clearly understood bolting was not as easy to do as going out for a midnight snack. The monk, whose only wish was to instigate mayhem in the world, owned nothing and had nothing and therefore, was fully committed to the cause for a rebellion. But he was a guardian prince and was as different from the poor wretches as day and night. How could he be dragged into the water by them?

But now he saw if he allowed his nephew to continue on the course, he would not even be able to become someone poorer than the poor monk.

Thus he began his preparations. He recruited many strong soldiers as his guards. He also conducted military trainings inside his own palace. It wouldn't do to revolt using wooden clubs and farming tools, thus large quantities of weapons were needed. Manufacturing arms would be noisy and there was no sound proofing technology available at the time. On this issue Zhu Di fully utilized his imaginations and creativity. He built a large basement and had it surrounded by walls. In addition, he also built many chicken farms around it. In this way, although in the basement the clattering noises never ceased, no one could hear anything from outside.

In addition, Zhu Di also learned from the experiences of the peasant rebellions of past generations. He wasn't shy from learning from brother peasants, inciting some superstitions or ancient legends before a rebellion was under way. For this purpose he recruited a whole bunch of special talents, who were dubbed as exotic magicians. In fact these were just those street fortune-tellers. He gathered these people and intended to do nothing but to prop up his own spirit. Besides, he also could use them for some propaganda. But even he didn't expect that this operation later would generate some unexpected effects.

Getting closer

While being busy on getting rid of the other guardian princes, the eyes of the emperor were always on Zhu Di. He also knew this man was the most formidable adversary of his. To reduce the strength of Zhu Di, he first sent Zhang Bing, deputy minister of works, to succeed as the mayor of Beiping. Then he appointed Xie Gui and Zhang Xin as the commanders of the Beiping forces and thus took control of the military there. Afterwards, he ordered Song Zhong (a rather ominous name[137]) to lead a force of thirty thousand to be deployed in the areas around Tunping and Shanhaiguan to be ready for action.

The knife was already mounted on his neck and Zhu Di seemed to have already become the meat on the chopping board. To many, his only recourse was to submit himself for arrest.

But just at this moment, Zhu Di did something no one expected.

By rule, after the emperor acceded to the throne, the guardian princes should come to the Court to pay respect to the emperor. But because the situation was very tense, many thought Zhu Di would not dare to see the new emperor as planned. But unanticipated by everyone, he not only came, but also did something astonishing.

In March of the first year of Establishing Civility, the Prince of Yan entered the Court to pay respect to the new ruler. Conventional wisdom would require him to be submissive on someone else's turf. But the fellow, while being watched by everyone, dared to enter the Court through the special passage way reserved for the emperor and ascended up the stairs without kneeling down first. From this we can see how arrogant Zhu Di was.

The arrogant behavior of Zhu Di enraged the Court officials. Zhuo Jing, the deputy minister of revenue and population, presented many memorials to the emperor to get Zhu Di fixed right away. But incredibly the emperor refused the proposal, which was sound, on the ground that the Prince of Yan was his close relative. Zhuo Jing was furious and roared:

[137] In Chinese, the name is pronounced the same as the phrase conducting a funeral, thus the quip by the author.

"Weren't Yang Jian and Yang Guang father and son?![138]"

But the emperor still refused his recommendation.

In this way, Zhu Di toured the capital city and returned to Beiping in extravagance, while Qi Tai and Huang Zi Cheng dutifully watched. That was the prowess of the so-called strategists, who were usually good at strategizing and making decisions on the maps.

Of course under the emperor not everyone was man like Qi Tai and Huang Zi Cheng. In fact, he had many capable subordinates.

The struggles behind the scenes

In this struggle, the emperor was not as fragile as he seemed. He also used many tactics and intrigues, especially in the areas of underground activities and he was very effective.

A success in inciting defection

Early in the first year of Establishing Civility (AD 1399), Zhu Di sent aide Ge Cheng to the capital to pay respect to the emperor. Actually Ge Cheng was a spy. His real purpose was to gather information. But Zhu Di never thought the man was persuaded and defected and the man who did it was the emperor himself.

Upon Ge Cheng's arrival, the emperor put aside his condescension as being an emperor and welcomed Ge Cheng with courtesy and dignity. Probably he also affably inquired about such things as his family's economic situation and encouraged him to do a good job. Ge Cheng was deeply moved. The emperor is so attentive to me! A rush of feelings overcame him and he confessed the various illegal acts of the Prince of Yan and his own real purpose as a spy. Then he proudly accepted the title of the Underground Agent of Emperor Establishing Civility. He stated he would work hard when he went back and would do his best to be an informant in the effort to bag the Prince of Yan and others as early as possible.

A nail was thus planted.

If Ge Cheng could be categorized as a low level spy, then the next spy would be a super spy. More ironically, the person didn't even know she was acting as a spy.

This person was the wife of Zhu Di and the daughter of General Xu Da.

Very often there were no tiger sons from a general's heirs. For example, Chang Yu Chun's son Chang Mao and Li Wen Zhong's son Li Jing Long. But there are always exceptions. Xu Hui

[138] Both were emperors of the Sui Dynasty. Yang Jian was the father of Yang Guang, who allegedly killed his father to become the emperor. But there was no evidence in history records to support that allegation.

Zu, Xu Da's son, was an exception. Although he was from a famous family, he didn't flaunt it. He was modest and well read on military strategies. He was also loyal to the emperor.

He took advantage of his family relationship and by chatting with his sister learned many things about his brother-in-law Zhu Di's study and work, and reported everything to Zhu Yun Wen, who always had a keen interest in Zhu Di.

In this way, much ultra-secret information was being continuously sent to Zhu Yun Wen.

On this front, Zhu Di's work was by no means inferior. His information source was somewhat unique, which was mainly provided by the eunuchs serving Zhu Yun Wen. Zhu Yuan Zhang had issued strict orders prohibiting eunuchs from interfering with state affairs. As the orthodox successor of Zhu Yuan Zhang, Zhu Yun Wen naturally took the order as the golden rule. Under him the eunuchs all toiled hard and low in status. But eunuchs were people, who had to have outlets for their feelings. They were very discontent with Zhu Yun Wen but couldn't find ways to express themselves.

Then, Zhu Di the savior came. He not only eagerly networked with the palace eunuchs, but also sent gifts to those everyone despised. Thus shortly the munificence of the Prince of Yan became widely known among the eunuchs and everyone was willing to serve the Prince of Yan.

Zhu Yun Wen never took note of the men he thought were worthy of no attention. But he never imagined that it was just these very humbled men who, to a certain degree, decided the outcome of this struggle.

Besides these eunuchs, Zhu Di also kept a close tie with two other men in the Court. The two could be said as the aces among his agents. Of course, unless it was the critical moment, Zhu Di would not play these cards. He would wait for the arrival of the final moment.

Huang Zi Cheng's fatal mistake

In April, after coming back to Beiping, Zhu Di reported to the Court that he fell ill. After some time, the illness became worse and eventually dire. The illness didn't emerge by chance. It had been brewing for a long time. Because in the coming May, Zhu Di had to do something he didn't want to do but he had to do.

May was the anniversary of Zhu Yuan Zhang's death. Per etiquette Zhu Di had to come in person to the capital. But Zhu Di sensed if he went to the capital again this time, he probably would never come back. But daddy's anniversary could not be avoided, thus he sent his eldest son Zhu Gao Chi and two other sons Zhu Gao Xu and Zhu Gao Sui as substitutes to attend the ceremonies. By all at once sending three sons, he was showing not only he was serious about

the event, he was also indicating he had no other motives.

This time Zhu Di miscalculated. The situation at the time was becoming clear. Zhu Yun Wen was bent on eliminating the guardian princes. Sending his sons to the capital was tantamount to sending hostages.

Surely enough, as soon as Zhu Gao Chi and his brothers entered the capital, Qi Tai, the minister of war, urged the emperor to take the three men as hostages. The emperor agreed, but Huang Zi Cheng thought this would trigger an alarm and the three men should be sent back to the Prince of Yan to show the Court didn't have the intention to eliminate the guardian princes, and to loosen the prince's guard.

What kind of reasoning was this! Half a dozen guardian princes had been removed and the situation was already boiling. Even beggars on the streets knew the Court was about to take actions on the Prince of Yan. On Huang Zi Cheng's face the words "Eliminate the Princes" were written, yet he still was stealing a bell with his ears muffed! There isn't much to say if a bookman is in charge.

The emperor hesitated. Now Xu Hui Zu, the Duke of Wei, came forward. By blood, the three men were all his nephews and he saw the three grew up. He understood their behaviors and conducts very well. He told Zhu Yun Wen he could absolutely not send the three men back. Not only the three men could be used as hostages, they were also very able. If the tigers were released back to the forest, the result would be unimaginable.

In hindsight, the fortune-telling skill of Xu Hui Zu was approaching that of a professional. His prediction turned to be true very soon after that. But what was still yet to come would be even more uncanny.

Continuing, Xu Hui Zu especially pointed out Zhu Gao Xu. He told Zhu Yun Wen, among his three nephews, Zhu Gao Xu was the boldest and rudest. Not only would he be disloyal to Your Majesty, he would also be disloyal to his father.

One has to admire him, whose prediction went even twenty years beyond and the accuracy was one hundred percent, which is better than weather forecast.

But the power for the final decision belonged to the emperor. Eventually he made the decision to release Zhu Gao Chi and his brothers.

If Zhu Yun Wen knew the role played by Zhu Gao Xu in that later war, he had to find a place to crash his head for the decision he had made. For this very reason, later he lamented: I'm so regretful that I didn't act on Hui Zu's words.

Unfortunately, the two words "regret" and "if" never have buyers in the market of history.

Far in Beiping, Zhu Di was already regretting for his reckless action. Surprisingly his sons

came back unhurt. They ate well and even seemed grew a little fatter. He was ecstatic and jumped off the bed. He shouted: “I am reuniting with my sons, Heaven is helping me!”

In fact the one who really helped him was his opponent Zhu Yun Wen.

Madman Zhu Di

Zhu Di understood what had to befall on him would befall sooner or later and there would be no escape from it. The throne wouldn’t be his if he didn’t try to take it. But it would definitely not be his if he didn’t try. Also, now he was against the wall. Zhu Yun Wen wouldn’t give him a pass. He was on a road to either the throne or death!

Give it a try!

But Zhu Di was still missing one thing, time. Being on a rebellion was not like going camping. Food, clothes, and arms for hundreds of thousands of men all needed time to prepare. To buy time, Zhu Di learned from the stories of his ancestors. He decided to feign madness.

Thus in Beiping there appeared one more madman. Strangely, when others exhibited their madness at home, Zhu Di did it in public, wherever there were the most people.

The symptoms of the madman Zhu Di were as follow:

1. Shouting and crying in public and uttering gibberish (rest assured, there were absolutely no anti-government slogans).

2. Trespassing into people’s homes at meal time, simpering, and grabbing other’s meals. But violence was not used (many beggars behaved the same way).

3. Sleeping out in the open. A single magical snooze would last a whole day.

This alerted the informants of the emperor, who sent Zhang Bing and Xie Gui to find it out. It was June and scorching hot. When the two came to the palace of the prince, they were astonished by the scene.

On a day that maggots would grow anywhere, Zhu Di was cladded with a thick cotton comforter and was “warming himself” in front a burning stove. While the two men stared at him without a word, Zhu Di uttered a classical line: “I’m frozen to death!”

The man must be mad. Zhang Bing and Xie Gui immediately came to the same conclusion and sent their report to the emperor.

What an endurance and patience it was to act on such a wretched tactic, in order to just get away from peril.

What in the world is power? So as to prompt men to bet with their lives!

Upon receiving the secret report from the two informants, for a while the emperor was very happy. Madman Zhu Di was also very happy. He finally had the time to prepare.

Zhu Di was mistaken in making the matter too simple. Because of an unexpected incident, his plan was shattered.

Zhu Di miscalculated. His aide Ge Cheng betrayed him. He reported Zhu Di's feigning of madness to the emperor. He also reported that Zhu Di was about to mobilize his troops. Qi Tai, the minister of war, who had been hesitating, finally made the right decision. He issued three orders: 1. Send an envoy to Beiping immediately; 2. Authorize Zhang Bing and Xie Gui to start monitoring the Prince of Yan and his relatives, and use force if necessary; 3. Order Zhang Xin, the commander of Beiping to immediately arrest Zhu Di.

It would have been a good contingency plan. But just like what we've said before, the most important part is the execution of a plan. There were no problems with the first and second order of the plan. The third order was the one that ruined the whole thing.

Zhang Xin wasn't considered a confidant of the emperor. He was a commander appointed by the prince. Placing such an important task on him by Qi Tai was like a child's play! Maybe the bookman listened to too many episodes of serialized stories broadcasted on radio, in his mind, arresting someone was just like "Hide five hundred swordsmen behind the tent, act when I smash the glass!". He didn't have any sense of the complexities and cruelties in power struggles.

Upon receiving the order, for a long time Zhang Xin couldn't make up his mind. He had a good relationship with the prince. But after all he was paid by the Court. If he informed the prince, not only would he have violated his professional ethics, he would also become a traitor as a senior government official. Once he embarked on that course, there would be no return.

My life is hung on a string, which is in my own hands!

At the critical juncture, Zhang Xin's mother helped him on the choice. When she heard about arresting the prince, she stopped Zhang Xin immediately. She said: "Don't do this (arresting the prince). I've often heard the prince will take over the country. A man like him will not die. He also is not someone you can arrest."

We may wonder. How could this old woman, who never ventured out beyond the courtyard, know some "divine secret" like this? If we analyze based on all the factors, the old woman probably was influenced by the rumors spread by the fortune-tellers roaming around the streets and markets. Thus she came to a conclusion as such.

It was really ironic that a decision as grave as this was influenced and decided by a reason so absurd.

Superstition kills.

Zhang Xin's decision

Zhang Xin was a man who acted right away once he made up his mind. He immediately went to the prince's palace to inform the prince. But unexpectedly, the prince refused to receive guests. Usually this would mean the prince's fortune was about to end, for he even refused to see his informant. Nothing would save him if he chose to do this. But Zhang Xin happened to be a stubborn man. He was determined to overcome all obstacles to become a rebel.

He smuggled himself into the palace by disguising himself. He revealed his identity again and asked to see the prince, who ran out of excuses and received him. But the prince didn't forget he was a madman. Like a patient suffering from stroke, he lay in bed and muttered unintelligibly. Zhang Xin saluted for quite a while and the fellow patient didn't utter anything.

Zhang Xin waited for a long time but the prince still didn't open his mouth. It seemed that the patient didn't intend to open his mouth.

Zhang Xin finally said: "Your Highness don't have to act anymore, I have something important to tell you!", which meant, you bastard, don't try to fool me anymore, I have an extremely urgent thing to do!

But Zhu Di was stubborn and continued to feign madness. He acted like he didn't understand Zhang Xin.

Zhang Xin couldn't bear it anymore (it seemed that trying to become a rebel was not an easy thing to do), he stood up and shouted: "Stop feigning, I have the imperial decree (arrest warrant) to arrest you. If you are serious about this, don't try to fool me anymore!"

Thus a miracle of historical proportion in medicine happened, a chronically ill and mad man suffering from strokes magically recovered. In an instant he completed a series of complicated actions of rising from bed, standing up, and kneeling down, which was truly remarkable.

Zhu Di saluted to Zhang Xin and repeatedly said: "You have saved the lives of my whole family!" He immediately summoned up Dao Yan, who had been waiting for a long time, to discuss about plans for action.

Things changed after this.

Qi Tai's backup plan

Since there was nothing from Zhang Xin, it was probably also foreseen by Qi Tai. Based on the progress of the event, he already expected this. Just days after Zhang Xin went to the prince's palace, Zhang Bing and Xie Gui, with the imperial decree for the arrest of the Prince of Yan, came with a large number of troops and surrounded the palace.

It seemed Qi Tai foresaw that Zhang Xin couldn't be trusted, thus he had a backup plan.

Thus, from the beginning of eliminating the guardian princes, events progressed and finally came to a breaking point.

Unmask the faces! Time for the final showdown has come!

The countermeasures in the palace of the prince

Soon after Zhu Di's recovery from illness, he became energetic. But he also didn't expect the enemy could come so soon. At the critical moment, he summoned Generals Zhang Yu and Zhu Neng to guard the palace. Because the incident occurred very suddenly, there was no time to mobilize the troops. But the soldiers outside were far more than the soldiers guarding the palace. Zhu Di was facing the most critical challenge in his life. To take the country, he had to first take Beiping, but now he couldn't even walk out of his palace!

What to do?

This was one of the most dangerous situations in Zhu Di's life. There were battle cries outside and the siege was watertight. If he wanted to confront it head on, he'd be surely crushed. What to do? Give up and get arrested?

Ways existed, like the saying "to nab a gang, nab the leader first". If he was able to get rid of the leader, the soldiers would become a mob without leaders. But it was not easy to do this. They came to get him. How could they put down their weapons and enter the palace to get themselves arrested?

At this critical moment, Zhu Di suddenly realized he might have missed something!

On what purpose did the people outside come? This seemed to be an obvious question. From their neat uniform, nasty expressions, and shining weapons, it could be surmised that they didn't come to enjoy a party. But the question was. Were they really coming to arrest him?

Zhu Di's speculation was right. Zhang Bin and Xie Gui didn't have the order to arrest the Prince of Yan. The order they got was to arrest the relatives of the prince. It just happened that there was no imperial decree to arrest him!

What an oversight in an otherwise well thought out plan. It also in a way showed the

audacity of the prince. When a man becomes a thief, pusillanimity rules his heart. Those who once ran afoul of the laws would run whenever they see a uniformed man, regardless if the man is a police officer or just a civilian municipal patrol. It's all because he is afraid. Zhu Di was indeed a man of fortitude, for he was able to remain calm and reflect. He was about to commit to doing something wrong yet he was not afraid.

Thus Zhu Di issued the order to invite Zhang Bing and Xie Gui to enter the palace. The two were not fools, they wouldn't enter. Seeing this, Zhu Di listed the names of the arrested and indicated the people had been arrested and need to be handed over to the government. Officers are needed to verify the identities of the arrested.

Now the two men had to go in. Under the circumstance if they didn't enter they wouldn't be able to finish the job, and also the imperial decree didn't authorize them to arrest the Prince of Yan. After a discussion, they decided to enter the palace. Initially they had many guards with them but they were disallowed on the ground that they didn't have the rank required. The palace of the prince was a place of prestige and persons of low rank shouldn't be allowed, which at other times this would be a commonly accepted practice. But now it was an extraordinary time, it would be too bookishly foolish if the practice was till followed. It just happened that the two were just so bookishly foolish. They voluntarily signaled the soldiers to obey the orders of the gate keepers. Then side by side, they strutted into the gate of hell.

Once inside the palace, everything was out of their control. Upon entering the main hall, they surprisingly discovered that Madman Zhu Di sat there with a cane in his hand and looked very feeble. When he saw them entering, he didn't rise and just ordered seats for them. The scene would be quite like now the gathering of gangs by a crippled gang leader. The gang leader Zhu Di didn't even look at them.

The hearts of Zhang Bing and Xie Gui began to tremor. But they were already there and it would be too late to think anything else. Luckily the atmosphere at the beginning was amicable. The host and his guests exchanged thoughts on certain issues of interests to both sides. The situation seemed to be moderating.

Just when the two began to secretly congratulate themselves, a housemaid brought out some slices of melon (probably water melon), and then Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan, suddenly wasn't crippled anymore. He held two slices of melon and walked toward Zhang and Xie. The two were awed and intimidated, and rose to thank the prince. But they didn't know the prince was playing a trick. It seemed it was too trite to use smashing class as a signal. He wanted to be a little creative.

Just when the two were about accept the melon, Zhu Di stopped. The Prince of Yan suddenly became the Prince of Hell. He was irate and pointed his finger to both and scolded:

“Even commoners are aware of the kinship among brothers and relatives. I am the uncle of the Son of Heaven, yet I have to worry about my life. If the Court can treat me in such a way, there is nothing that cannot be done in the world!”

Finished, Zhu Di threw down the melon to signal the palace guards to tie them up. The two usually didn’t have to pay even when they dined out, now they lost their heads for wanting to eat a slice of melon. At the same time, Ge Cheng was also arrested. Zhu Di issued an order and they were all executed.

So it seemed in those years even eating a slice of melon was not an easy thing.

Zhu Di threw away the cane from his hand and looked at the people around him solemnly. He cried: “I’m not ill. There are treacherous people wanting to persecute me. I have to do this. Now, it is what it is and no one can blame me.”

Chapter Twenty Seven

I Have to Bolt!

Open break!

The blood of the killed wasn't even wiped clean, when Zhu Di issued his proclamation. A deadly silence befell.

Soldiers knew war was about to begin. They would have to hang their heads on their belts to fight. Relatives of the prince knew their lives were about to change. They either would be elevated to royals of the emperor from the royals of the prince, or demoted to death rows. Anyhow, change, especially change from a decent current situation was always hard to accept.

After all, everyone was a human being and each had his own thought. Things like rebellion were not something worth celebrating, especially before the success. Even the solemnly perorating Zhu Di would be timorous in his heart. But one man was truly ecstatic.

This man was Dao Yan. To him, this was the best opportunity. He was already sixty four. To wait for this moment, he had expensed everything! Throughout his life, there were no youthful high-spirited exhilarations, nor lavish and sensual pleasures. There were only hardships and hard studying under a lonesome light day after day.

He was a well-read scholar but didn't achieve much. He had thoughts on the world but no one knew. He had endured for so many years, if he didn't do it now, when!

Rebel, let's rebel, so many are now in the same boat. We won't be lonely even on the road to hell.

Go atop of the zenith of happiness, or to hell, so that life won't be wasted.

Zhang Bing and Xie Gui were killed, but their soldiers were still waiting outside. When soldiers saw their men went in but didn't return, the first thing that came on their minds was not if the two were in danger, but rather the issue with their belly.

Soldiers were human beings. If they followed you with knives in their hands to fight for you, you had to feed them. But apparently the two big brothers today didn't care much about brotherhood. There must be good food and drinks inside the palace. But little brothers were

left outside swallowing the wind. It had been too long and it also got dark, if they waited longer, no one would pay them for overtime, thus many of them either went home or found other fun things to do. The crowd dispersed.

But there is no wall in the world that would be absolutely wind-proof. Very soon the news that Zhang and Xie had been killed became widely known. The boss was killed and it was a big deal, thus many soldiers picked up their weapons again to surround the palace. But although they had the numerical advantage, they didn't have a commander. There were some valiant individual soldiers but they were soon repelled.

There is no way back once an arrow has been let fly. They did it and they had to do it to the end!

Zhu Di immediately issued the second order to take Beiping.

General Zhang Yu led his troops and attacked the nine gates of Beiping in the night. The soldiers who were on the nine gates didn't even have time to react and there was no fierce resistance. Zhu Di didn't have to use much effort to take control of the nine gates.

At the time if one controlled the gates of a city, one practically would have control of the entire city. The saying "beat the dog with the doors closed" has its reason. The city that the emperor spent a great deal of attention and sent numerous generals to guard was taken in just three days by Zhu Di.

Generals and soldiers in the city all fled. Even Ming's General Song Zhong also ran away upon hearing the news. He took thirty thousand soldiers and retreated to Huailai.

Zhu Di finally took the city of Beiping. The city that once was the Great Capital of Yuan was now in Zhu Di's hands. He would begin his conquest here!

Give me a reason for the rebellion

Zhu Di had prepared for a long time for the arrival of this day. The soldiers had ample supply of arms and provisions. But he still was lacking one thing, the reason for rebellion.

Was a reason necessary for rebellion? Necessary, yes it was absolutely necessary. In the business of rebellion, it didn't seem that important to have a reason. But in reality, although a reason was not a must, it was necessary.

It was even more so for Zhu Di, who was a guardian prince and not a poor peasant. The object of the rebellion was a legitimate emperor. Regardless how it was looked at, he was in the wrong. It was really necessary for him to find an excuse. Even if he couldn't fool others, at least he could fool himself.

Zhu Di and Dao Yan started to look for a legal basis from the vast number of Ming laws, which was pretty much like the lawyers in the court of law trying to find some loopholes in the legal system. Their efforts paid off. They finally found a loophole in the laws, which was a brilliant walk of a fine line.

Zhu Yuan Zhang didn't anticipate that his sons would rise up against his grandson. He made a set of very complicated rules to restrain the guardian princes. But to prevent the so-called treacherous officials from making troubles, he also specified that in emergencies the guardian princes were allowed to use their forces to save the emperor. It was specified as: "If there are no officials of good conduct and treacherous ones prevail in the Court, then the princes should train and arm their troops to be ready to serve the emperor, who shall issue secret orders to the princes, who shall command their troops to restore the order."

But the key in the law was that it required a secret decree from the emperor. To Zhu Di and Dao Yan, the problem was not hard to solve. The fully utilized their proficiency in *The Art of Thick and Black*. They simply ignored this requirement. They claimed there were treacherous officials in the Court and they needed to send troops to "resolve the crisis" and to remove the emperor's inner circle.

Even more incredibly, they put their absurd arguments in writing as a memorial to the emperor and asked the Court for the men they are accusing. They pretended to be outraged, which was like a thug on the street slapping someone in the face and then angrily asking for the whereabouts of the perpetrator and insisting on upholding justice on behalf of the victim.

The creation and development of the theory of "resolving the crisis" fully showed that Zhu Di had become fully skilled at a very important principle in power struggles and intrigues:

"If you like something that belongs to someone else, take it and a defense attorney can always be found" – Frederick II.

An ominous feeling

With everything ready, if it was to be done, then one just had to do it. But since ancient times China had been a country of proper etiquettes and rituals. Even something like rebellion would need a ceremony. Cadres had to delivery an address first to summarize the goal and great purpose of this rebellion, as well as to explain the actual ways of executing it and issues like compensations for loss of life and relocation. Then others added more, soldiers clapped to indicate that they understood it. Then the rally ended and the fight began.

Zhu Di's rebellion was not an exception. As far as one month back even before Zhang and Xie were killed, he already gathered some of his subordinates and conducted a private rally.

Of course it was done in secret. But in that rally an unexpected incident occurred and it aroused an ominous feeling in Zhu Di's heart.

That was the seventh of June, when he summoned men who were in the rebellion to declare his plan and prop up the moral. But just as when he was at the height of his delivery, a tempest came. Tiles on the roof were blown away and everyone was badly shaken.

This was really an ominous sign. Contemporaries wouldn't be able to attribute it to the quality of the construction or weather condition. What they were discussing was something that was supposed to be secret. Then all of a sudden this happened. Was Heaven against the rebellion?

Zhu Di panicked. Heaven came down to spoil his peroration. It happened so sudden that he was stupefied. At the critical moment, it was Dao Yan who showed his usefulness. He shouted: "When the real dragon is soaring into the sky, he is sure to be accompanied by wind and rain. Now the tiles flew down to the ground, it is a great auspicious sign!"

Thus after a round of superstitious propaganda, falling tiles became a seal of approval by Heaven to support Zhu Di. If so, Heaven had been a malleable person, who always acted to follow people's wishes. Thus the saying "Do right on Heaven's behalf" is really something that shouldn't be taken just by words.

The soldiers could be easily fooled. They were not educated, never met Heaven, and never met the emperor. They believed whatever was told by their superiors. But Zhu Di was different. He clearly knew what it really meant by being an emperor or the son of heaven. Things like the will of Heaven and stars coming down to earth were all manufactured to fool others and soothe oneself. At critical moments, one could only rely on himself.

More than once he compared himself with the current emperor. He thought he was far more superior to that little kid on military and political skills. In addition, he was absolutely confident in his own force. The troops from the capital were all spoiled and had not fought for a long time. Of course they were not a match against his lionhearted soldiers.

But the man in the capital was the real emperor, he was only a prince. To sit on that throne, he had a long way to tread and it would be an unpredictable journey.

Zhu Di's premonition was not wrong. He was about to embark on a very strenuous journey. Although as noble as a prince, he must take the country by fighting through the metal clattering and life wrenching battles. The enemies he would encounter were not only the feckless ones like Huang Zi Cheng. There were many formidable adversaries waiting for him. He would also be suffering from the wraths of these men.

No more pondering. The road ahead is full of danger but it's still better than waiting here

to die!

Rebel! Zhu Yun Wen, cede your seat to me!

Song Zhong's response

Song Zhong was a man with an inauspicious name and average military capability. Initially he was not an important man in the emperor's plan. But the precipitously deteriorating situation propelled him to the center of the crisis.

The southern troops around Beiping swarmed to Huailai, where he stationed. The situation was chaotic. At the critical moment, Song Zhong exhibited his amazing courage. In a short time he received and settled many soldiers and reorganized them. But the panic among the soldiers was not something he could quell. In many times, the best method to quell a panic was anger. To restore the fighting spirit of his soldiers as soon as possible, Song Zhong decided to tell a lie. He probably told many lies in his life. But in reality this time his lie was rather a lame one.

Song Zhong sent men to spread a rumor that says the families of the soldiers in Beiping had all been killed by the prince. The soldiers were indeed enraged and vowed to fight to the end. Finally Song Zhong was able to put his mind at ease and focus on preparing to fight the prince.

But when the prince's troops actually launched the attack, something unexpected happened. The vanguard of the enemy soldiers didn't rush up to fight, rather they shouted and cried. The shouts and cries were much like the words shouted at the exits of airports or train stations when people were receiving the travelers. All of a sudden, the shouts of calling fathers, sons, and brothers were heard everywhere.

In fact Zhu Di learned about Song Zhong's lie and he specifically deployed the relatives of the soldiers to go out as vanguard. The purpose was to undermine the moral of Song Zhong's troops. The method worked very well. Song Zhong's soldiers felt they had been cheated and started to run away. Out of desperation, Song Zhong had to go out and fight in person. But the situation was unsalvageable. In the end, Song Zhong's force was completely annihilated and he was also captured.

Zhu Di attempted to lobby Song Zhong to surrender, which he sternly refused. Finally he was executed by Zhu Di. Although Song Zhong was not very talented he was courageous to face a decisive battle and didn't yield even when threatened by death. He didn't betray the

word Zhong[139] in his name.

The news of the defeat was quickly sent to the Court and the emperor was shocked. Now he understood the thing he had been dreading finally happened. Now they could only converse in knives and swords.

The only candidate

Zhu Yuan Zhang's killings of the accomplished generals finally showed their insidious consequences. When Emperor Zhu Yun Wen looked around, he was surprised to see that it was very difficult for him to find an experienced man to deal with Zhu Di.

The only one left was Geng Bing Wen.

Geng Bing Wen was a townsman of Zhu Yuan Zhang. He was very experienced in combats and was trusted by Zhu Yuan Zhang. After the war he was bestowed as the Marquis of Changxing and a contributor of first rate. Apparently it was just for the situation today that he was left alone when Zhu Yuan Zhang killed numerous other officials.

Zhu Yun Wen's idea was right. The only candidate could only be Geng Bing Wen. But he also made a mistake. He didn't seem to mull deeper about a question. That is why his grandfather singled out Geng Bing Wen to preserve?

In the Martial Splendor Era, celebrity generals were plenty. Although Geng Bing Wen wasn't a bad general, he was not that prominent. In those years when famous generals were found everywhere, there were many generals better than him and among them, many also kept low profiles. Zhu Yuan Zhang killed so many generals who made great contributions to the founding of the empire, but he was left to remain. What was exceptional about this man?

The secret was actually hidden in his title. The reason that Geng Bing Wen was conferred as the Marquis of Changxing was because he guarded Changxing for ten years, during which he defended against Zhang Shi Cheng's attacks. The city was never taken and as such he tied up a large number of Zhang Shi Cheng's forces.

Every general had something he was good at and something he was not good at. What Geng Bing Wen was good at was defense. Putting everything together, one has to admire Zhu Yuan Zhang's wisdom. Lan Yu and Wang Bi, who were good at offense, had all been killed by him. Geng Bing Wen, who was good at defense, was kept. Even if Geng Bing Wen would become disloyal, he wouldn't be able to do much. But if there were foreign invasions, Geng Bing Wen would be put to use.

[139] The Chinese word Zhong here means loyalty. Please note there are many words with the same pronunciation and they have various meanings.

But the task assigned to him by Zhu Yun Wen was to attack and the target of the attack was Zhu Di, who had been messing around amid the famous generals and was well versed in military strategies. His military talent was not a bit inferior to the top rated generals of the Martial Splendor Era. It just happened that his prowess was offense.

Geng Bing Wen accepted the task. A confrontation between a spear and a shield was about to begin.

Zhu Yun Wen understood clearly his uncle Zhu Di this time was for real. He couldn't be careless. Thus he offered the command of three hundred thousand troops to Geng Bing Wen. He hoped he would once be able to put down the rebellion. To show he was serious about this, he personally sent Geng Bing Wen off. It was in this ceremonial farewell, Zhu Yun Wen did the most foolish thing in his life.

At the same time when he handed the army to Geng Bing Wen, he said to him in a sincere and earnest tone: "Please ensure that you don't make me to bear the infamy that I killed my uncle."

Although he did many stupid things in his life, in my opinion this one was the most stupid.

This is like someone takes a knife to fight someone and pauses after having injured his opponent, sends him to a hospital, and resumes the fight after he is out of the hospital. Although Zhu Yun Wen learned many things from Zhu Yuan Zhang, he didn't get the most critical rule, which was also the credo of Zhu Yuan Zhang in his entire life.

Do it not, or do it completely.

Probably Geng Bing Wen, upon taking Zhu Yun Wen's order, was also perplexed. What kind of war would it be if the commander of the enemy's arm was not to be hurt? But he still departed amidst the perplexity. What welcomed him would be a fate full of dangerous unknowns and omens.

In August, Geng Bing Wen led his army to Zhending. He sent Xu Kai to garrison Hejian, Pan Zhong to garrison Mozhou, and Yang Song as vanguard to advance to Xiongxian. Once the main forces converged, they would launch attacks. Thus we can see that Geng Bing Wen was indeed an experienced veteran. He knew very well that to fight deep inside enemy's territory, he had to be cautious. His triangle deployment fully exhibited his rich combat experience and his solid training in geometry.

Everything was ready and all they had to do was to wait for Zhu Di.

Zhang Yu' boasting

Zhu Di knew Geng Bing Wen better than his nephew. He understood that the old general was not a simpleton and mustn't be taken lightly. Thus before the battle began he sent Zhang Yu, the best general under him, on a reconnaissance mission. But Zhang Yu, after finishing his probe, sent him an unexpected reply.

The young Zhang Yu didn't seem to place much respect on the senior. He told Zhu Di the enemy troops were undisciplined and Pan Zhong and Yang Song were men of no intelligence. Geng Bing Wen was nothing more than an old guy and it would be as easy as flipping one's palm to defeat him and open to the road to the south.

We've learned that if someone boasts before a battle, the result is usually not good. But sometimes the boaster has gotten plenty of capital to boast.

Zhang Yu had the capital. He said those words after a careful analysis and study and Zhu Di agreed with him. He led his force to Lousang and prepared for his first wave of attack.

The target of Zhu Di's attack was Xiongxian, which was defended by Yang Song. For this attack he also chose a perfect time, the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival.

A Mid-Autumn night of city taking

Zhu Di's choice of the Mid-Autumn night attack was taken only after careful considerations. Soldiers were humans and even in a war holidays were celebrated. It was the time to think about their parents, wives, and children. But to the soldiers at Xiongxian, their longings would be stopped right there.

Zhu Di's soldiers didn't celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival. They quietly climbed up to the parapets of the city wall in the dark night when the soldiers inside the city were all drunk. Totally unguarded, upon seeing the unexpected guests, they were stunned. Of course they would not take these men as Chang E or Wu Gang[140]. Thus Commander Yang Song sent men to Pan Song for reinforcement while organizing his troops to resist the attack. Yang Song knew they were deployed in a mutually reliant formation and if Pan Zhong could send in reinforcement in time, they would be able to repel the enemy.

But unfortunately, due to numerical inferiority, Yang Song and all of his soldiers died in battle. He wasn't able last to the moment when the reinforcement would arrive.

Where was the reinforcement?

[140] Chang E and Wu Gang are fictional characters in Chinese legends. They are gods who live on the moon.

The fate of the reinforcement

Pan Zhong indeed received Yang Song's request for help. He immediately recognized the battle had begun and the situation was critical. If Yang Song's Xiongxian was lost, he would also be finished. Thus he rushed his cavalry to Xiongxian.

Hurry up! Yang Song, hang tight, reinforcement is coming!

He was indeed fast. Very soon he arrived at a stone bridge named Rippling Moon Bridge. Now of course Pan Zhong couldn't spare his mind on where this place was. But if he had been there before and took a careful look, he would find that below the bridge there were a lot of aquatic plants.

As soon as Pan Zhong and his troops passed the bridge, a bomb suddenly exploded and the plants under the bridge disappeared. Numerous soldiers emerged, occupied the bridge, and cut off the retreat route of Pan Zhong's force. At the same time, alongside the road and ahead appeared large numbers of soldiers of the Yan army, who attacked Pan Zhong ferociously. Pan Zhong could neither advance nor retreat. He was cloistered and soon his entire army was annihilated. He was also captured. Probably when he was being captured he was still in a trance.

Zhu Di was not a man without sophistication. He recognized Geng Bing Wen's formation and understood the advantage of dividing the forces meant mutual support. If something happened in Xiongxian, Pan Zhong must come to the aid and he would be attacked from both inside and outside of the city. But Geng Bing Wen didn't expect Zhu Di acted so swiftly. He took advantage of the time difference by employing a lightning strike. He first finished Yang Song and then ambushed on the way from where the reinforcement would come. He shot two birds using one stone. He was just extremely formidable.

Zhu Di got his first victory. But he also knew the decisive battle and trials were still ahead. Soon after, he had to face Geng Bing Wen and his three hundred thousand troops. That would be a real test.

Opportunity

Just when Zhu Di was planning his next attack, a man came to his camp. This man was Zhang Bao and he was one of the deputies of Geng Bing Wen. He was not feigning defection. He provided important information to Zhu Di. The Ming army was now scattered and not all of the three hundred thousand men arrived. Now there were only more than a hundred thousand troops deployed at the north and south banks of the Hutuo River. If Zhu Di attacked each one individually, he would achieve a complete victory.

Upon hearing this news, everyone was ecstatic. They also thought they would be victorious if they attacked when the enemy was scattered and they suggested advancing immediately. But Zhu Di's reaction was totally unexpected by everyone.

He didn't take Zhang Bao's advice to attack the scattered Ming forces. Rather he sent Zhang Bao back to tell Geng Bing Wen his army was closing in and asked Geng Bing Wen to get ready.

This was another trick that was befuddling. Was Zhu Di worried that there were too few enemies?

Indeed, he was concerned about there were too few enemies and they were too scattered. His real intention was to get Geng Bing Wen to concentrate his forces after receiving the information, and then fight a decisive battle with him! To him, if the enemy was divided it would be harder to defeat. He could be attacked from all sides. It would be better to get all of them together and finish them off.

From this plan, it can be seen that Zhu Di was very confident in his ability to command. In his view, Geng Bing Wen was not to be afraid. All he wanted was no more than just a face to face battle!

The helpless Geng Bing Wen

Just as Zhu Di hoped, Geng Bing Wen concentrated his forces and waited for Zhu Di's arrival. Regardless if Zhang Bao was a spy or not, this was his only option.

To the sexagenarian Geng Bing Wen, a man who was about to retire, fighting was not something that gave him pleasure. When he learned that the formation he carefully laid was thrusted open and Yang and Pan were cut like vegetables by Zhu Di, he couldn't help to be amazed by the forty year old military leader's capabilities. He was a man that had seen the world. The figures of Xu Da, Chang Yu Chun, and Li Wen Zhong accompanied him for many years. Their ferocious attacks and uncanny ability in assessing situations left deep impressions in his mind. In those years, under the auras of them, he could only do things that his capability allowed him to do. As the men died off, he also once thought that there weren't many left of those who knew how to fight.

But now, he finally recognized he was facing a formidable enemy, one who knew how to fight and was tough to deal with.

Attack was not his forte but Zhu Di's forces were continually advancing toward him. He had no choice but to combine his forces and wait for the attack. But to a general who commanded an army of three hundred thousand this was a real humiliation. Do or die,

regardless, there must be an end. Zhu Di, come on!

The tragedy of Li Jing Long

Zhu Di was anxious in his camp. Geng Bing Wen was indeed an old sly fox, who knew Zhu Di couldn't afford a prolonged stalemate, decided to stay put. This made Zhu Di extremely anxious but there was nothing he could do.

Time was not important to Geng Bing Wen, who could kill time by drinking tea and watering flowers each day. But to Zhu Di, time was more expensive than gold. Because Zhu Di was a rebel, who, to a certain extent, could be categorized as a fake and defect product, which could have a market in times of turmoil. But now it was time of peace and there weren't many who were dissatisfied with the government. It was hard to find men who wanted to make trouble. In case someday these men didn't want to rebel anymore and wanted to become well behaved again, he would be left as a commander of none, then that would be really bad.

The issue must be quickly addressed.

Just at this time, his informants told him that Geng Bing Wen had been relieved of command and Li Jing Long would take over the command.

Zhu Di couldn't believe his ears. When he hoped for something, something came. He leapt and ecstatically gave a speech. If one has to give a title to the speech, it can be titled as *On Li Jing Long Being an Idiot in Military Affairs and the Certainty of His Demise*.

There were five points in the speech and there is no need to enumerate them here. Overall, the conclusion was that Li Jing Long was doomed to fail!

Without fighting a single battle, a newly minted commander had invoked a great ecstasy in the heart of the commander of his enemy.

Tragic! Li Jing Long, I am truly sorry for you!

Regardless how feckless Li Jing Long was in Zhu Di's eyes, he had five hundred thousand troops. Zhu Di could afford to despise Li Jing Long, but he couldn't afford to overlook those soldiers. After a brief moment of happiness, he fell into deep pondering again.

With the current strength of his force, if he fought head on, he didn't have a good chance to achieve victory. The enemy's ability to resupply was far more superior to his, thus it was also not a good idea to wage a war of attrition. The only real solution was to concentrate his force and strike a fatal blow to the enemy.

But his own force was not strong enough. Although his soldiers were good at fighting, their numbers were few. In addition, he had to send men to defend a large area of his home

base around Beiping. He couldn't get those untrained civilians to fight. But there were just that many soldiers who could fight. Where were the other forces he could make use of?

There was only that man, from whom he had to seek aid to ensure victory. There were no other alternatives!

But this matter must be planned out with care and executed by him personally because no other man was able to deal with that man. But the enemy was upon him. Li Jing Long, as foolish as he was, would attack Beiping as soon as he sent his army out. Could Beiping resist the attack by an army of five hundred thousand?

There wasn't much else to consider! It would be ominous anyway if he stayed. He already did what he did and he had to bet on it!

Zhu Di assigned the task of defending Beiping to his eldest son Zhu Gao Chi and solemnly told him: "I give the city to you and you must keep it. Wait for me, and on the day when the great army returns, it will be the day of victory!"

Suffering physical disability, this was the first time Zhu Gao Chi saw his father talking to him in such a solemn tone. He sensed a crucial test was coming to his way.

Zhu Gao Chi's premonition was not wrong. This war would not only decide Zhu Di's fate, but also influence his own future.

Target, the Prince of Ning!

Zhu Di usually was condescending. Among the many princes, there were only a few that he respected. The Prince of Ning was definitely one of them. One of the contemporaries said about the princes: "Yan is apt at fighting and Ning is apt at strategizing." The Prince of Yan was such a cunning man and yet there were ones who attributed the Prince of Ning with strategizing. In this sense this was a man of terrific capability.

To Zhu Di, the most terrifying thing was the Prince of Ning's special force, Duoyan's Guards, which was a force Zhu Di dreamed and it was also the army with the best fighting prowess at the time. But the command of the army already belonged to the Prince of Ning. If he were to get it, there was only one method. He had to get rid of the Prince of Ning.

In the war against the princes, the Prince of Ning was not immune. The emperor also worried about the uncle that was good at fighting. At the same time when he acted on the Prince of Yan, he also laid his hands on the Prince of Ning. But the Prince of Ning obviously didn't have the kind of rebellious spirit like Zhu Di's. Although he didn't wish to obey he wasn't bent on rebelling. But nonetheless in his heart his feelings were mixed, like a fox lamenting the death of a rabbit.

Zhu Di took advantage of this and led his army to the territory that belonged to the Prince of Ning, who was aroused. Although his situation was not satisfactory he didn't want to be a rebel. He ordered his army to be ready. If there was anything out of ordinary, he would teach the Prince of Yan, a good fighter, a lesson.

But Zhu Di's action surprised him. The brother prince left his army outside of the city and entered the city alone. Thus the Prince of Ning received him. When they met, Zhu Di acted like he was a man suffering from an unfair persecution from the emperor, which he denounced. In addition, he declared he had nowhere to go and asked his brother to act as an intermediary to the Court to seek pardon, as well as providing him with food and shelter.

The Prince of Ning finally understood the intention of Zhu Di and happily accepted his request. To him, this man, proclaimed to be the strongest among the princes, was nothing more than just a coward. Half way on the expedition to eradicate the bad officials in the Court, he was already about to give up. Of course he would write a letter, but it's up to the Court to decide if he would receive a pardon.

Now the miserable Zhu Di carefully made another request. Because all of his deputies were outside of the city and it would be inconvenient, would it be all right to get some of the officers to enter the city so that he could settle his affairs? Of course the main army would not enter the city.

Initially the Prince of Ning hesitated but after being assured that the army wouldn't enter the city, he agreed. He believed that a group of men without weapons wouldn't be able to do much.

Zhu Di strictly obeyed the agreement. He didn't send the army into the city. But the men he brought into the city were carrying another powerful weapon, money.

Thus Zhu Di settled down in the prince's territory. Each day, besides food and drink he chatted with the prince. Unexpectedly he didn't ask the prince to join him, nor did he ask for anything extraordinary. A guest of this sort naturally would be welcomed by the prince. But it would be enough with just superficial courtesy, the prince constantly reminded himself that the man in front of him after all was a rebel, and it would be better to cordially request his leave as early as possible.

But before he expressed his idea, Zhu Di already made a proposal. He said he had stayed here for too long and would like to go back. The prince was very happy. The plaguing devil finally decided to leave and he said he would send him off.

The sendoff ceremony was held outside of the city in the suburb. True compassion or not, nonetheless there were words of affection between the two. The prince now felt a little bit of

compunction and regret, he said to Zhu Di: “Brother, I am sorry that I haven’t been able to help you.”

Zhu Di smiled and he took hold of the prince and said: “If so, brother, how about join me to remove those bad officials in the Court?”

These were not words of pleasantries. The prince at once said sternly: “Brother, if you need anything you may ask, the business about cleansing the Court is not something to joke about.”

Zhu Di looked at his eyes and shook his head in a serious manner: “I actually really need you. Not only you, but also your Duoyan’s Guards and everything you have. Now follow me.”

The prince finally understood Zhu Di’s purpose. But he wouldn’t give up so easily: “Aren’t you assuming that you can do whatever you want in my territory?”

“I know,” Zhu Di smiled again, “therefore I asked you to send me off in the suburb.”

Zhu Di gave his order and the soldiers that had been hiding all came out and took control of the situation. The prince also wanted to act but he found his men now wouldn’t obey him anymore, for the money clinging leaders of the Duoyan’s Guards had already been bribed by the men Zhu Di sent into the city. They now became Zhu Di’s men. All of a sudden, from a guest, Zhu Di became the host. Except General Zhu Jian’s valiant resistance to his death, very early on all others already laid down their weapons.

Men can’t be trusted. The Prince of Ning, who was known for his cunning, thus was kidnapped by another cunning man and embarked on the road to cleansing the Court. His melancholy state was understandable but in the current situation he could only submit. His attitude also satisfied Zhu Di. Eventually he relocated the prince and his descendants to Jiangxi, which was nonetheless an auspicious end of him.

Of course Zhu Di would never imagine after one hundred years, the descendant of the Prince of Ning would copy him and revolt against his descendant, which confirmed that famous saying:

Once out in business, sooner or later one has to pay back what he owed.

Chapter Twenty Eight

A War of Life and Death

The defense of Beiping

As Zhu Di was plotting against the Prince of Ning, Beiping was also under attack. Just as Zhu Di predicted, Li Jing Long led five hundred thousand southern troops to surround and attack Beiping. He erected fortresses at all nine gates of Beiping and sent forces to attack Tongzhou. At the same time, he also set up nine camps at the Village of Zhengba to provide support for the attack.

Once everything was ready, he launched the attack on Beiping.

Now the defender of Beiping was Zhu Gao Chi, the eldest son of Zhu Di. Zhu Gao Chi was a man with physical disability. According to history records, he probably contracted polio when he was a child. He was immobile and required help to move around. In many people's eyes, he was a useless man. But Zhu Di knew his son very well, who had steel-like inner strength despite his feeble exterior. He was convinced the cripple's inner strength was much more powerful than his exterior. The fact that he gave the task of defending Beiping to Zhu Gao Chi fully illustrated his trust in his son.

But trust was one thing, whether or not the city could be defended was another matter.

In reality, a city being under attack by five hundred thousand men was not a joking matter. The southerners used large numbers of cannon to assist the attack. Hundreds of thousands of men climbed up the walls of the city like ants. Although the defenders in the city were prepared, they were still stunned by such an immense scene. In just such a moment of stupefaction, the situation of the battle changed.

Because of inadequate preparation by the troops at the Shuncheng Gate, most of them broke the ranks and dispersed. The southern troops took advantage of the opportunity presented and launched fierce attacks on this gate. When it was about to be taken, General Liang Ming came. He reorganized the troops and joined the resistance. Amazingly, showing the spirit of loving no rouge but ruckus, some of the women in the city used their special

weapons, bricks and tiles to repel the attackers. In this sense, the saying about smashing people with bricks rather has a historical root.

Of course it would be hard to assess the efficacy of this kind of actions, but at least it raised the morals of the soldiers who were defending the city and helped them to thwart the attack. After the fierce battle, the troops attacking the Shuncheng Gate were thrown back and for the moment, Beiping was saved.

Zhu Gao Chi's thinking was far quicker than his movement. He knew if it continued like that, sooner or later Beiping would fall. If he wanted to wait to the return of his father, he had to find other means. Thus he made an audacious plan.

Now, looking at the tottering city of Beiping, Li Jing Long was very pleased. He was the son of Li Wen Zhong and he was very handsome. But there were always men saying he was just a dandy and didn't possess much talent. Of course a dandy would never admit he was a dandy. He was always on the hunt to prove himself.

This would be an excellent opportunity. He was convinced if he took Beiping and defeat Zhu Di, he would be able to escape from his father's shadow and let everyone recognize him!

Actually, fighting didn't seem to be hard. The city in front of him couldn't hold for long. There weren't many tricks that could be played in an isolated city. The day to enter the city triumphantly was not far off.

But as night fell, the situation changed unexpectedly. The northern forces inside the city even dared to go out of the city in small teams and raided the large army outside of the city! The southern troops never thought the isolated army inside the city was even daring enough to attack and they panicked. To ensure safety, Li Jing Long ordered a retreat and moved his camp ten lis back.

But not everyone was as clueless and cowardice as Li Jing Long, Military Governor Qu Neng was a man of wisdom. He found the opportunity amid the tumultuous situation. He accurately determined that the night raid of the northern troops was nothing more than just trying to disguise and buy time. Amid the chaos it was the best time to take the city!

After carefully studying the defense of the city, he determined that the Zhangye Gate was the weakest one. He led several thousand of his men and launched a ferocious attack on this gate. The situation was indeed just as he determined. The northern troops were indeed just bluffing! Under his attack, the soldiers defending the Zhangye Gate broke ranks and fell back. Just when the gate was about to be taken, Li Jing Long did something very despicable.

Li Jing Long didn't betray his reputation of being an idiot on military affairs and didn't disappoint Zhu Di's expectation of him suffering from acute mental weakness. The gate was

about to be taken but he immediately ordered to cease the attack. The reason was simple. He just didn't want someone else to take the glory away from him.

With a superior like Li Jing Long, even God wouldn't be able to win a battle.

There is surely a reason for the saying: "If you don't take what Heaven has offered to you, you bear the consequence". When Li Jing Long prepared his forces and was ready for another attack, Haven came out to express himself.

It was November and the temperature was extremely low. Although it has been several hundred years and the name of the place had been changed from Beiping to Beijing and vice versa for several times, except more frequent sandstorms, the climate hasn't changed much. Now days there are snow plows to clean up the roads. Pedestrians clad in thick winter overcoats and slip-resistant shoes have to tread carefully to go to work. But at that time, what the southern troops had to do was attack the city in the freezing weather.

Although in the city Zhu Gao Chi didn't major in physics, he must have a decent scientific attainment. He ordered his men to pour water on the city walls. The next day, the city of Beiping became a castle of ice. The same method seems to also work for building an ice sculpture. It was simple and effective.

Soldiers outside of the city suffered. Not to mention taking the city, there was nothing that could be gripped on the big ice cube in front of them. They could do nothing but watch.

Helped by Li Jing Long's foolishness and Heaven, Zhu Gao Chi held the city and waited to the return of his father. The defense of Beiping was Li Jing Long's disgrace, but it was Zhu Gao Chi's opportunity. This was the battle that won him sufficient political capital. Later when he acceded to the throne he probably thanked Li Jing Long.

Zhu Di's return

Zhu Di returned. The Zhu Di now was already a different one from a month ago. Under his command he had cavalry of Duoyan's Guards, the most formidable force of the time. To the excellent general Zhu Di with a strong foreign help, the prowess of the troops under him was proportional to the fighting quality of the army as a whole. But to a foolish commander like Li Jing Long, the quality of the soldiers was usually related to the success rate of his escape. Although numerically Zhu Di's force was far inferior to that of Li Jing Long's, he knew the commander of the proclaimed five hundred thousand men was nothing more than just an egg, brittle outside and soft inside. What he had to do now was to completely smash the egg.

Li Jing Long's headquarters was at the Village of Zhengba (it was about 20 kilometers from Beiping). Although he reacted slowly, he nonetheless knew after leaving Beiping, Zhu Di

would one day return. After receiving the information that Zhu Di was returning, he sent his deputy Chen Hui and his cavalry of ten thousand to stop Zhu Di. But to Chen Hui's dismay, he didn't have the exact location and target for his attack, for Li Jing Long, the man who sent him out, also didn't know where Zhu Di was!

But he still had to execute the order, thus Chen Hui took his ten thousand men on a long man-finding trip. But under the freezing weather with low visibility, where could he go to find Zhu Di? All Chen Hui could do was roaming around with his troops. But what Chen Hui didn't know was Zhu Di was advancing toward Beiping not far from him.

Lucky or not, Chen Hui and Zhu Di's forces passed each other by a shoulder's length and they didn't meet. But after coming across tracks of Zhu Di's march, Chen Hui discovered prints of a lot of horse hooves. Chen Hui was ecstatic, he finally found the enemy! He followed Zhu Di's force along the track. He didn't immediately take action. Rather he readied himself for a two sided attack once Zhu Di came near to the headquarters.

That would be a good plan. But Chen Hui was not Lan Yu and Zhu Di was also not the emperor of Nothern Yuan at the Fishing Sea. Soon after being discovered by Chen Hui, Zhu Di sensed he had been followed. He didn't waste time and sent his newly acquired Duoyan cavalry to attack Chen Hui. The Mongols, having just received favors from Zhu Di, were eager to prove themselves. They swiftly defeated Chen Hui's cavalry of ten thousand men. Chen Hui got lucky, he fled back.

The battle greatly elevated the moral of the northern troops. Very soon they arrived at the Village of Zhengba, Li Jing Long's headquarters. Having received the information, Li Jing Long was ready to meet his childhood friend. Zhu Di also was about to teach a lesson on military theory to his distant paper general nephew.

The Battle of the Village of Zhengba thus began. Zhu Di sent his most powerful force the Duoyan's Guards to rush the center of the main camp of the southern troops. The Mongol cavalry didn't betray their reputation. With overwhelming ferocity they took seven southern force's camps in succession. The southern troops were beaten and broke ranks. This also showed that if someone is willing to pay, he can get good foreign help.

Although the southern forces were badly beaten, they still had enough strength. After reorganizing, they gradually settled down and began to fight the northern troops. Hundreds of thousands of men fought desperately. The sky darkened and blood streamed. Being in a stalemate was not good for Zhu Di because he couldn't afford a battle of attrition. He asked for advice from his men.

Now a man named Ma San Bao correctly pointed out that the fatal spot of Li Jing Long's

force was at the center. If Li Jing Long moved, they could take advantage of the opportunity and to attack by cavalry from left and right and success would be guaranteed. After some consideration, Zhu Di adopted Ma San Bao's idea. He also appointed Ma San Bao as a deputy general to join the fight. Now it was already dark. Just as expected, Li Jing Long didn't have the patience anymore and led his force at the center to come up to fight. Zhu Di immediately sent cavalry to attack from the flanks. As expected, Li Jing Long couldn't hold on and retreated.

Because both sides suffered great casualties, soon after an un-brokered consensus was reached, both sides withdrew. Taking the opportunity, Zhu Di organized his soldiers to prepare for the big battle next day. But something unexpected by him happened. Li Jing Long was far feckless than he could imagine. Not only didn't he possess any military talent, he was also as timorous as a mouse. Previously when he heard the savagery descriptions of the battlefields from his father, he didn't take much heed. Now he saw personally the scene of brutal slaughters, he was truly shocked.

This was neither a joke, nor a casual chat. This was a battle of hundreds of thousands of men. This was the ruin of numerous lives. War shouldn't be like this, it ought to be like what was said in military books. It ought to be about strategizing, what a grandeur that would be!

I can't continue like this. I won't be able to win. This is not a place where I should be.

Li Jing Long made up his mind. He decided to retreat to the south in the night. In a way this was to preserve his army, because he indeed wouldn't be a match against Zhu Di. But the despicable part of this man was that he cared only about his own escape. He forgot to inform the soldiers who were besieging Beiping!

The fellows who were attacking Beiping were indeed wretched. Encumbered by such a foul weather and under a wretched command, there was every reason for a defeat. Attacked from both inside and outside of the city, the besieging force collapsed.

Thus the Battle of Village of Zhengba ended with Li Jing Long's complete defeat and Zhu Di's complete victory. This battle was very significant to many men. In this battle, by his own action, Li Jing Long showed his reputation as a feckless man was not a fiction. In a way he proved himself. Meanwhile Zhu Di acquired a large number of additional troops and began to seize the initiative of the war. Zhu Gao Chi, the eldest son of Zhu Di, via the victorious defense of Beiping, obtained the attention and liking from his father, as well as accumulated political capital. And the man named Ma San Bao was also placed at important positions for his conduct in this battle. He was also taken as Zhu Di's confidant. When he was born, he was named He[141] because his parents thought the world was peaceful and wished him to grow up

[141] In Chinese, this word means peace. Note that not all words pronounced as 'he' has this meaning.

in peace. Also because he made great contributions at the Village of Zheng, he was bestowed the surname Zheng, thus after that he changed his name to Zheng He.

A second chance

News of the defeat was quickly heard by Huang Zi Cheng. He was very nervous because Li Jing Long was recommended by him. If Li Jing Long fell, he would be also down by association. After some careful pondering, he decided to suppress the truth and keep Li Jing Long's position as the commander.

He already placed his bets on Li Jing Long, so he had to be with him to the end. Li Jing Long, I'm going to trust you one more time.

Having suffered a serious defeat, Li Jing Long finally began to come to his senses. He now realized what war meant. It didn't mean blustery and snowy romances, it didn't mean talking about strategies through the night, rather it meant the horrible and spine chilling sound when knives and swords punched through a human body, it meant the fresh blood gushing out everywhere, and it meant the wretched howling of soldiers on the verge of agonizing death.

Li Jing Long started to doubt himself. In this brutal war, could he really win over Zhu Di? But regardless of his thoughts, as long as the imperial court didn't issue the order to change the commanding officer, he was still the commander of hundreds of thousands of troops.

The arrow was already placed on the bow and it had to be launched. There were no other options. A dead horse had to be tended like it was still alive.

After the defeat, Li Jing Long withdrew to Dezhou to organize his forces and prepare for the next battle.

He knew very well that although he could explain away by the conventional notion that triumphs and defeats were a way of life in wars, if he suffered another defeat, that wouldn't be a matter of convention anymore. With hundreds of thousands of men in his hands to lose to the numerically inferior northern forces, he'd had difficulties not only to explain back in the capital, but also to face his subordinates.

After all, he was the son of the celebrated General Li Wen Zhong. He wanted to save his face. If he was able to defeat Zhu Di, he could still salvage his reputation.

But it was not that easy to defeat Zhu Di. Obviously the childhood friend's military talent was far superior to his. Although he didn't have that many soldiers, the quality of the soldiers was better. In addition, he had the Mongol cavalry, who killed without blinking. This was indeed a formidable opponent. To defeat him, some help was needed.

Who could be obtained to help? Was there anyone in the world that could match Zhu Di? The answer was affirmative. Li Jing Long found the man who could defeat Zhu Di for him. To a certain extent, he indeed found the right man.

Li Jing Long finally had his mind at ease. He began to carefully plan the preparation for an attack.

In fact, to Li Jing Long, the reason that he couldn't defeat Zhu Di was mainly attributable to that he was not as capable as Zhu Di, as well as that the quality of the southern troops was inferior to that of the northern troops. Undeniably, these were some of the reasons, but they were not the main reason. The real difference between him and Zhu Di was their resolve.

Now, the triumphant Zhu Di was celebrating the victory with smiles on his face. But in his heart he was still unsettled. He knew very well that to him, every battle was the decisive battle. From the moment when he rose up with his troops, he bore the incriminating name of being a rebel. Except a few close confidants who wished nothing but turmoil in the world, very few supported him.

Can the ecstatic men under me be really trusted? Who can ensure that in some night they wouldn't take my head for an official position? I have extraordinary military talent and my horse hoofs treaded thousands of miles all over Mongolia. But I am not the emperor. I can defeat Zhu Yun Wen ten times but he is still the emperor. But even if Zhu Yun Wen defeats me once, I may never recover and I'll be a prisoner waiting for death!

This was indeed a business of immense risk. Everyday could be the last day and every battle could be the last battle. The daily psychological pressure and mental torture forced him to continuously to bet with his life! But that was not something Li Jing Long could understand. Li Jing Long could still go back to home if he lost the war. If all else failed, he could just surrender. But if Zhu Di failed, what waited for him was only death and humiliation.

Nothing is more heart wrenching in one's life than to play a game that he absolutely cannot lose.

Under the shadow of death, Zhu Di had to face a new challenge. From Dezhou, Li Jing Long had already signaled attack and he had to accept it and defeat him. To Zhu Di, achieve victory was not about taking the throne anymore, it was about remaining alive.

In year two of Establishing Civility (AD 1340), after being ready, Li Jing Long took his army out. His target was the White Gorge River, where he would meet his helpers.

He had two men helping him. One was Guo Ying, the Marquis of Wuding, and the other one was Wu Jie, the Marquis of Anlu. The two could be said as old officials of the previous era, who had rich battle experience. In the battle that was about to begin, they would play

extremely important roles.

Guo Ying and Wu Jie were not bad, but the most able help Li Jing Long found was not from them. It was from another man.

When Li Jing Long was preparing to launch another attack from Dezhou, Zhu Di also received the same information from his network of informants. Facing an opponent of Li Jing Long's ilk was not a concern for him. To him, Li Jing Long was nothing more than a sheep, who also held the position of being a quarter master for him.

He assigned tasks to his generals with ease. After the two previous battles, the military talent and reputation of Zhu Di had been recognized by his men, who believed that as long as they followed Zhu Di, they feared no enemy.

As usual, Zhu Di also asked the names of Li Jing Long's generals. Upon hearing that the vanguard of Li Jing Long was a man named Ping An, his subordinates surprisingly saw a flicker of alarm appeared on the usually calm face of Zhu Di.

It should be said that in this battle Li Jing Long did a few right things. Among them, choosing Military Governor Ping An as the vanguard was one of them.

To Zhu Di, Ping An was a man to be feared of. The man not only was ferocious in battle, he also had an advantage over Zhu Di that no one else had. He was once a subordinate of Zhu Di's and followed Zhu Di for years in battle. He knew Zhu Di's tactics very well.

Ping An knew Zhu Di was just like Zhu Di knew Li Jing Long. To fight against a man who knew everything about him was indeed a tough thing.

But the matter was already it was. Regardless who was the enemy, he had to fight on and fight to the end.

Zhu Di led his troops to the White Gorge River. When he arrived at the destination, Li Jing Long, along with Guo Ying and Wu Jie, was already there waiting for him.

This time, Zhu Di saw more soldiers, horses, tents than last time, which were deployed according to military doctrines in an orderly fashion. Men were seen back and forth and it was a grand scene.

It was not possible to be not grand because this time Li Jing Long was set to throw in everything he had. He brought with him six hundred thousand men, proclaiming one million. He was bent on defeating Zhu Di.

But in Zhu Di's mind, the six hundred thousand men of Li Jing Long's were nothing of concern. The real enemy was only Ping An.

He specifically warned his generals: "The guy Ping An was originally with me and he

knows how I fight. Don't bother with others, we must defeat him first!"

In fact it didn't have to take Zhu Di's warning. After learning Zhu Di's army had arrived, Ping An already started his first charge.

Prelude to the big battle

After arriving at the White Gorge River, the northern troops set up camp at Su's Bridge. But very unfortunately, they ran into the troops of Ping An, the vanguard, who should be considered one of the most ferocious men. In battles he never shouted words like "brothers, forward", but rather showed the noble style of "comrades, follow me".

In this battle there was no exception. He took up his long spear and acted in an exemplary way to lead the charge toward the northern troops. The father and son team of Qu Neng, who excelled themselves in the last battle, upon seeing their commander's charge, also didn't waver and followed on Ping An's heel on the charge. Their soldiers were stunned by the scene and after a brief shock they returned to their senses. If their leaders charged, how could the little soldiers remain in their place!

Thus Ping An's vanguard soldiers charged into the camps of the northern troops like madmen. They fought back and forth. The northern army was routed. The northern troops never thought that the southern troops, who had been seen as weak by them, could be so ferocious. They weren't prepared for this and broke ranks to fall back.

Being in such a situation just at the beginning of the battle was not something expected by the northern army. Without other recourse, they had to retreat. Thus the power of examples can be limitless.

But the nightmare of the northern army was not over yet because another general, Guo Ying had prepared another unexpected present for them.

Guo Ying departed from Zhending and arrived at the White Gorge River later than Li Jing Long. Although he didn't have a brave general like Ping An, he did bring with him a large quantity of weapons of a new style, fire arms. Based on the analysis of history records, these fire arms could be buried in the ground to attack enemies. Thus we can assign a modern name to the fire arm, mine.

As Ping An was fighting with the northern troops, Guo Ying was not idle. He estimated the route of movement of the northern army and laid a lot of mines on the road that they had to go through. When the northern army was defeated and withdrew, he received this great present from Guo Ying just in time.

The wretched northern troops had neither mine detectors nor the so-called engineers. To go

across, they had to use men to remove the mines. Thus every one rushed on and those who stepped on the mines were simply just unlucky and they had to reincarnate in their next life. Those lucky ones could embrace that they still were alive. In history records, in this battle, Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan "fought a rear guard action behind three cavalries". I have always been moved by the spirit of Comrade Zhu Di, who risked his own life to save others. But on the whole, it didn't seem so, that kind of action seemed to evoke the suspicion that he was using others to remove the mines.

The rear guard Zhu Di wasn't blown off by mines, but he had no fewer troubles. Because the northern force suffered a great defeat, the situation was tumultuous. When the battle ended, it was already midnight and it was so dark that they couldn't see their own fingers. Zhu Di even lost his way. Of course, in that place, it was impossible to find a police officer to ask for direction.

Zhu Di had to dismount from his horse and prostrate on the ground to identify the direction of the river's flow (that didn't seem to be a decent posture). After quite a while he was able to find the directions. Only after that, covered by dust, was he able to return to his camp.

Back in the camp, Zhu Di was more irate the more he thought about the battle. Since the start of his rebellion, this had been the first time he was so soundly humiliated. Anger drove him to make an audacious decision. He didn't regroup his troops as usual. He ordered his generals to prepare for attack immediately. When the day broke, it would be the day of battle!

Li Jing Long was ecstatic, for he finally saw his first victory. It showed that Zhu Di was an ordinary man, who could be defeated. Ever since the last defeat, the censures from the generals and the complaints from the soldiers were always swirling around him. The invisible pressure was so great that he couldn't have his head held up. Now the time to wash off his disgrace had finally arrived.

Zhu Di, my glory was lost on you and I'm going to take it back from you!

In the same night both sides prepared for the same thing. They polished their armor, sharpened their weapons, and waited for the moment of first daylight. To many of them, this would be their last night. They wouldn't think about the meaning of life. To them, the only thing they had to do was to wait for the arrival of the moment and then pick up their knives and swords to kill those whom they didn't know.

The night was very long, but it was also extremely short.

The moment of the decisive battle finally came.

Zhu Di and all of his men marched in formation toward the battlefield. Across the river

waiting for him was the six hundred thousand troops of Li Jing Long.

The dreadful Ping An

The battle was started again by the southern army. Ping An and Qu Neng, who performed well yesterday, didn't utter a word, rolled up their sleeves, grabbed their gears, and rushed forward. But if you thought they were just foolishly brave, you would be wrong. The target of their charge was not the front of the northern army, but the back!

Ping An, Qu Neng, and their troops turned a big circle to the rear of the northern army. The chosen target of their attack was the rear guard commanded by Fang Kuang. Ping An, ahead of his troops, charged into the enemy formation. He waved his long spear and wounded quite a few northern generals. No one could stop him! Under the command of the two mad men, Fang Kuang's army quickly collapsed.

As such, Zhu Di's battle plan was disrupted. Amid the chaos, he calmly assessed the situation. The only way to win was to strike the center of Li Jing Long's force with concentrated force. If the center was defeated, the situation certainly would improve.

To achieve this goal, he ordered General Qiu Fu to lead an attack on the enemy's center. After taking the order, Qiu Fu exerted his full strength to attack the center of Li Jing Long's army. But it was ineffective. Li Jing Long's center didn't budge. In this battle, Qiu Fu disappointed Zhu Di. Later history showed this wouldn't be the last time that he disappointed Zhu Di.

Although Qiu Fu's failure was disappointing to Zhu Di, it didn't affect his plan because to some extent, Qiu Fu was only a chess piece to distract the enemy's attention. The lethal move would be delivered by himself.

The ones who fought against Zhu Di would discover that although the man had the reputation as a good fighter, he liked playing tricks. He rarely charged his enemy head on. Rather he usually launched sudden attacks from the enemy's flanks. This conformed to the doctrine "meet head on but win by surprise" in military strategy books. This was the most significant feature of Zhu Di's military artistry.

There was no exception this time. Soon after he issued the order asking Qiu Fu to attack the enemy center, he led his main force to the left flank of Li Jing Long's army. He would completely defeat Li Jing Long right there. In numerous past battles he used the same tactic and achieved victories. He was convinced that this time, without exception, it would work again.

But when he arrived at the left flank of the enemy and was getting ready for the attack, he

heard noise from his own rear. Something he never expected happened. Li Jing Long, using the same tactic on him, also flanked and attacked him while he was turning. Now the northern army was in a tough battle.

Now Zhu Di was dumbfounded. He never thought the situation would deteriorate so bad like this. Among the many reasons, the main one was that he took Li Jing Long as a real idiot. It must be noted that although Li Jing Long would intermittently exhibit symptoms of being idiotic, most of the time he was a normal person. He had already been had by Zhu Di using this tactic and by no means would he not learn from that.

Now Zhu Di was already in an extremely dire situation. He was deep inside the enemy territory and the target of everyone. The southern army had got him surrounded and they were just waiting for being rewarded for taking him.

Zhu Di's dire situation

In such a circumstance, Zhu Di showed his attribute as a brave general. It was not realistic to wait for others to save him. He had to save himself. The skills he perfected in those years when he was on expeditions now were of use. Like a cornered beast, Zhu Di fought desperately. He first shot down enemies with arrows and after the arrows ran out, he drew out his sword to slash without discrimination. His sword then broke and he had to change his horse three times. Blood stained his armor. He could no longer hold on anymore.

Zhu Di knew if he stayed there he would die without a body in one piece. He was surrounded by so many, even if he was cut only once by each man, it would be more than enough to chop him into meat fillings for making dumplings. He decided to withdraw back to the river bank.

But at this stage of the fighting, it was not possible to withdraw as he wished. After toiling to the river bank, Generals Ping An and Qu Neng of the southern army also arrived just in time. Without his men to desperately protect him, the battle probably would have ended.

Seeing the situation was advantageous, Li Jing Long issued his order: commence general assault!

The northern army could only hold up with desperation. Now Zhu Di no longer had any reserve left and he had no backup plan. But Li Jing Long's army was approaching the river bank. This was the most critical moment of Zhu Di's life up to now. The dream of being a supreme ruler was about to evaporate. In despair, Zhu Di seemed already had the feeling of the long ice cold spears punching through his body.

At the last moment, Zhu Di conjured up another means, although it was not really a means,

he decided to play a trick again.

Risking his life, he rode up to the highest point on the river bank and brandished his whip and acted like he was summoning up men. This should arouse the suspicion that he was pilfering the method used by Zhang Fei, when he guarded the Bridge at Long Slope in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*[142]. By doing this Zhu Di certainly didn't want to become a target of arrows. His action resembles shouts made by some gangsters in a street fighting: "Don't go away you bastard, wait for me to get my men to finish you off!"

Whether or not the trick would work was not decided by Zhu Di himself, but rather by the degree of foolishness of another man. He ran to the high ground because he hoped his action would be seen by that man.

The man was Li Jing Long. Again, this time he didn't disappoint Zhu Di. Upon seeing Zhu Di's action, he made the wrong judgement. He thought the northern army was waylaying him. Thus he ordered the southern army to retreat. Taking the opportunity created, Zhu Di finally escaped from the river bank. The northern army also got a brief moment of reprieve.

Although Li Jing Long's judgement was wrong, he still had superiority in strength. But now Zhu Di was really moaning. Since he launched his rebellion, he had never been in such a fierce and brutal battle. He had committed all of his forces to the battle and he didn't have one more soldier to spare. He was also wounded a dozen times and extremely tired. Were the preparation and endurance of more than a dozen years about to end like this?

No, I will never give up! Stay on. As long as I stick to it, things will change!

Propped by such a belief, Zhu Di and his army continued the bloody fight against the southern army.

Being unflappable had its merit but remaining unflappable wouldn't necessarily bring about victory. In the situation now, the probability that Zhu Di could overturn his fortune was miniscule. It seemed except hoping for some help from Heaven, no other possibilities existed.

And even if Zhu Di truly believed there was a god in heaven, he would not want to rebel again.

Zhu Di's bad luck was far from ending. Now the northern army was at a disadvantage, but because it possessed higher fighting quality, for the time being it could maintain a state of stalemate. But then, a southern general launched a new assault and the stalemate was broken.

Next to Ping An, General Qu Neng was one of the most valiant generals in the southern

[142] This is a famous passage in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It describes a scene in which Liu Bei's general Zhang Fei, who had to guard a critical bridge to block Cao Cao's army's pursuit. He placed a few cavalrymen in a small wood behind him and ordered the men to stir up the dust to feign a major movement of a large body of troops.

army. Particularly in this battle, he was even more active and he was in his best condition. He was like having been injected with some stimulant. He rushed everywhere and killed numerous northern troops. He was more ferocious than anyone. But he was not just simply a brave brute.

In the stalemate, he acutely sensed the opportunity that Zhu Di was on the verge of collapse. If there is one more charge, he will be completely destroyed! To accomplish the great deed, there is no one but me!

Now the soldiers were locked in a dog-eat-dog battle. The fight went on from dawn to noon and formations of both sides were mixed up. They fought each other by just looking at each other's uniform and there were no tactics.

Qu Neng's calm mind enabled him to reorganize a large group of soldiers. He regrouped them into columns and wanted to launch the final attack to completely defeat Zhu Di! After they were ready, he shouted: "Finish Yan! Finish Yan!" and led the charge against the northern army. Probably there were also people shouting: "we go with you, we go with you!". Seeing that their commander was so brave, his men were very encouraged and all rushed forward to the enemy line.

Qu Neng's charge threw Zhu Di's defense line into a total confusion. The already very fragile line was again cut into segments by the southern cavalry. It seemed that the road to becoming the Son of Heaven for Zhu Di was about to end there.

But what happened next was really mind boggling and it surprised everyone. It's mysteriousness really can't be explained in terms of laws of history.

The event happened when Qu Neng's charge was taking place and Zhu Di's army was about to collapse. To describe this event, we have to substitute using the languages in *The Placard of Gods* or *Travel to the West*[143]: "It was clear and cloudless. All of a sudden, the colors of the sky and the earth changed. Sands blown and stones rolled. A devilish gale started. It could be seen that the gale wrapped itself around the flag of the commander. Suddenly there was a cracking sound and the flag fell to the ground as the flag pole broke!"

What happened was really mind boggling. The wind blew at no other time but at that exact moment. In such a big battlefield, anything could be blown, but it rather blew and broke the pole of the commander's flag. If this was not recorded in official history, it would be really hard to believe.

The southern men were dumbfounded. The sudden turn of events was something no one expected. At the time nine of the ten soldiers were victims of superstition. When Zhu Di

[143] Two well-know Chinese fictional novels.

announced his rebellion, even two falling tiles would have to be explained with great effort. Now the banner of battle was blown off. It was like the signboard of a business had been smashed. Who would have the spirit to fight in such a time of panic?

But Zhu Di was ecstatic. He was just so lucky, events turned just when everything seemed to be at a dead end. The probability of it happening is like someone spends two bucks buying lottery and wins a huge sum of five million. Of course more than he could ever imagine that in his later military career, he would twice win five millions.

Zhu Di was a man who was capable of grasping the opportunity. Taking advantage of the panic in the southern ranks, he moved to the rear of the southern army and launched a fierce attack. The panicking southern army couldn't mount a resistance and the entire army collapsed. Zhu Di was a do-gooder that would finish a job and a Buddhist that would send the Buddha to heaven, taking advantage of the direction of the wind, he set off a fire. The fire raged in the wind and in the conflagration the northern army launched the general assault.

The sudden change greatly surprised Qu Neng. He turned and saw the main camp was in an ocean of fire. Soldiers ran in all directions and the northern cavalry chased and killed the fleeing southern troops. Defeat was now a foregone conclusion and there was no way to turn the tide back. But now he was already in the enemy formation and surrounded. It was impossible to break off. He looked at his son, who had followed and fought with him all the time, grimaced a smile, and said: "Now is the time to show our final devotion to the country." He then continued fighting. Both father and son died in the battle.

The southern army was routed. Even the most capable fighter Ping An couldn't hold up against the northern army's attack anymore. He fled with his troops following him. Li Jing Long, who was used to fleeing, didn't utter a word and led the army running to the south. The veteran Guo Ying was also not to be outdone. Probably he was so extremely disappointed with Li Jing Long that he didn't even want to go together with him. He ran toward the west alone.

In this battle the southern army suffered casualties of more than one hundred thousand and the remainder all ran off. A defeated army was like a collapsing mountain. For sure Zhu Di would not miss the opportunity to give chase. He ordered to launch a general counter attack and vowed to bag all six hundred thousand southern troops. In that situation, he could have easily achieved this wish of his, but the appearance of another army shattered his dream.

While on the chase, Zhu Di was astonished to find an intact and elite army with high spirit on his way. The man commanding the army was no other than Xu Hui Zu. How could Xu Hui Zu have an entirely unscathed army as the rear guard? We'd have to go back to before the battle to explain this.

Before the battle began, Zhu Yun Wen met Xu Hui Zu alone and asked him to be the rear guard for the main army. Although Zhu Yun Wen gave the command of the main army to Li Jing Long, he was doubtful about his ability. To be safe, he specifically asked Xu Hui Zu to guard the rear. Unluckily the strategy got the chance to be put to use.

Under Xu Hui Zu's cover, the army had the time to retreat. It also preserved the strength for the next counterattack.

The Battle of the White Gorge River ended. In this battle, Zhu Di defeated the powerful southern army. Although the victory was achieved by being lucky, it was nonetheless a victory. From now on he basically seized the initiative of the war. The victory also pushed his reputation to the highest point. Even his enemies had to admit that Zhu Di was indeed the best general of the time.

Zhu Yun Wen in the capital should also have learned something from this battle. In my opinion, there are at least three: One, Li Jing Long was a true idiot on military affairs and he should be tossed off like garbage; Two, environment protection was a big issue, more trees should be planted to prevent the occurrence of stormy sandy weather; Three, flag poles should be made from iron and no corners should be cut in making them.

The triumphant and tired Zhu Di returned to his main camp with battle wounds aching all over his body. This was truly the hardest battle he had ever been. Without that gust of wind, it would be hard to say who would eventually win. But anyway, he did win.

Since the start of the rebellion, he finally was able to sleep with ease. Li Jing Long's army of six hundred thousand was defeated and it was defeated by his army of just over a hundred thousand! This was a remarkable achievement. Confidence slowly permeated through his chest. He even began to think that the time was a stage specifically set up for him. On this stage, no one else could stand up against him. He would continue to act alone, until at the end of the road toward the throne.

Look around the world, who dares to oppose me!

While Zhu Di was rejoicing his victory, Li Jing Long's clumsy act still didn't finish. Soon after he arrived in Dezhou, the northern army caught up and without uttering a word, Li Jing Long abandoned the city and fled. He faithfully accomplished the task of delivery military provisions to Zhu Di by leaving nearly a million dans of grain. The resupplied northern army seemed to enjoy taking advantage of the quarter master and continued to pursue him without respite. They chased him all the way to Jinan.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Zhu Di's Nemesis

Zhu Di's past military actions all took place near his own territory. Even if the southern army was defeated, it still could organize for another attack. But it was different this time. If the northern army took Jinan, they would be able to occupy this key position, with which they would be able to retreat to Beiping or advance to the capital. This was just like erecting a blockhouse at the door of Zhu Yun Wen's house. Whenever he felt like it, Zhu Di would be able to fire couple of shots. If that became a reality, then nothing could be salvaged by the southern army anymore.

But the situation already presented itself. The strongest force in the southern army had already been defeated, who would be able to turn the dangerous situation around?

In fact this was also what on Zhu Di's mind. He could count the few spears in Zhu Yun Wen's hands with his eyes closed. Who would be able to oppose him? He had already packed up and was ready to go fishing in the Lake of Great Ming in the city.

Cut it off here, Zhu Di. After all, Heaven was fair. The nemesis you yearned for had already arrived. He was right in the city in front of you and waiting for you!

A quartermaster

When Li Jing Long was fighting the Battle of White Gorge River, an official from Shandong took up the responsibility for provisioning Li Jing Long's army. He was diligent and provisions were never at shortage. But his laborious work wasn't enough to reverse the loss of the battle. When Li Jing Long was routed, he retreated with Li Jing Long, but his speed of retreat was far slower than that of the long legged commander.

On the way he continuously gathered up and organized the fleeing soldiers. In the eyes of the people in the situation, it was an incomprehensible act. The house was about to fall and a lone column wouldn't be able to stop the fall. In addition, as Li Jing Long was getting routed, all the prefectures and counties on the heel of his retreat surrendered. The world was about to

change at any moment and everybody was thinking about his own future. But this man was still doing this kind of work, which was incomprehensible to not only officials and generals, but also those soldiers he was gathering. They didn't understand why he collected them. To where was he going to bring them?

"Jinan," he said, "We're going to defend Jinan."

"The commander has run away. Can Your Grace do it?"

"I am the lieutenant governor of Shandong, an official of the imperial court. This is my job."

The name of the man, who had timely provisioned troops, did his duties on his job, and stood up at the critical moment, was Tie Xuan.

Tie Xuan was a native of Dengzhou (present day City of Dengzhou in Henan). He didn't have a glaring resume but amazingly he was a scholar without military background. In the years of Martial Splendor he was appointed palace emissary at the Ministry of Rites straight from a student of the Imperial College. After Emperor Establishing Civility acceded to the throne, he was appointed lieutenant governor of Shandong.

But it was just a scholar of this sort that took up the responsibility that no one would want to take to save the country in peril.

Tie Xuan was not a sort of swashbuckler who grew up reading military literatures and brandishing his sword at every rooster's crowing. Before this moment, his objective in life was to get educated and become a good official. He was once also timid and frightened when he saw the slaughtering in the battlefields for the first time. At his position, if he chose to join Zhu Di, he should be able to receive a promising commission. But in the end he chose to adhere to his own principles and beliefs.

In his eyes, Zhu Di was not a hero persecuted by treacherous court officials and was forced to cleanse the Court. Rather he was a perfidious imperial subject who disrupted a peaceful and prosperous time with an insidious purpose. Guided by his moral principle, he was not able to accept such a man as the new ruler of the country.

It was easy to refuse but hard to stand up and resist. Although Tie Xuan was a bookman, he understood war was not a child's play. If he chose to resist, he would face Zhu Di, the best commander of the time.

What could be used to resist the dreadful enemy, the *Four Books and Five Classics*, or rectitude and morality?

These were all useless. But Tie Xuan had his own weapon, the patriotic zeal and unyielding belief.

On his way to Jinan while also organizing the soldiers, he met a man named Gao Wei. It was this man who firmed up his resolve.

Gao Wei was a native of Liaozhou (present day Zuoquan in Shanxi). He had known Tie Xuan since a very early time and their friendship was deep. As officials ran to join Zhu Di in droves, Gao Wei instead ran off from Zhu Di's territory. His goal was the same as that of Tie Xuan's, to devote himself to the country.

In Linyi Tie Xuan met this old acquaintance of his. The two hugged and sobbed and poured out their feelings to each other. They swore oaths to defend Jinan until death!

Besides Tie Xuan and Gao Wei, another obscure official also left his name in history for his valorous conduct.

The man's name was Wang Sheng. Before the war, he was the commissioner of education in Jiyang and led a tranquil life. A commissioner of education was an official position, similar to a position in today's bureau of education. His day job was to teach students. After Li Jing Long's rout, he was captured by the northern soldiers who entered the city. He was forced to surrender but he gallantly refused. His vehement peroration even moved the soldiers, who released him.

But more unexpectedly, after being released, he didn't go home to continue living like he used to be. Rather he summoned his students and taught the last lesson of his life at the Hall of Exemplary Order, a place where he usually taught.

He said to his students: "I have taught you many things. But among them you may not know the gist. Today I shall tell you that the gist rests in the two words of the name of the hall, "exemplary order", which I beseech every one of you to remember." With that said, he crashed his head into a column. Upon seeing the tragic horror, the students wailed. They rushed up to try to resurrect him but it was already too late.

Not being intimidated by tyranny and to live in submission, Wang Sheng died for his belief. His death was worthy of his cause.

The dead Wang Sheng and the hurrying Tie Xuan were of the same kind of men, who all struggled for their beliefs. The only difference was that one didn't have a way to serve the country and another was serving effectively.

Despite that your enemy is infinitely more powerful than you and you don't have a good counteract strategy, as long as you have the determination and courage to face the powerful enemy, miracle can be created.

With a desperate determination, Tie Xuan and Gao Wei led some remnant troops to Jinan. But when they arrive at Jinan, they were surprised to find that Li Jing Long took another

defeat. Actually Li Jing Long fled all the way to Jinan and reorganized his troops. By then he still had more than a hundred thousand men. He planned to resist but didn't expect that Zhu Di didn't leave the chance to him.

Zhu Di and his army launched a fierce attack on Li Jing Long, who now was beaten so badly that he suffered from Zhu Di-phobia. He was routed as soon as the contact was made. This time his escape was even more complete. He ran back only by himself on his horse and left all the more than a hundred thousand troops to Zhu Di.

In this circumstance Tie Xuan entered Jinan. He would have never thought that as a scholar in here he would carry out everlasting achievement and be remembered by generations of people in this city.

Right in the city of Jinan, Tie Xuan met another man who had influenced him in his entire life. The man was Sheng Yong, who was one of Li Jing Long's unit commanders. Despite the word Yong[144] in his name, he was absolutely not a mediocratic foolish man. On the contrary, he was a general of superb military talent. Although under Li Jing Long, even men of extraordinary talent would be of no consequence.

To them, it was rather a good thing that Li Jing Long fled. Tie Xuan and Sheng Yong finally were able to get rid of the cumbersome guy to create a miracle that belonged to them.

Now the city of Jinan was filled with panic refugees and remnants of the defeated troops. There was no public order and soldiers capable of fighting were an extreme rarity. This was the mess that Tie Xuan had to deal with. Heaven also didn't give him much time. Zhu Di, with his over one hundred thousand troops, was preparing to attack.

This seemed to be another disproportional confrontation. Many men in the Scholar Tie Xuan's shoes would have opened the gate and surrendered long ago. The fact was clear. Li Jing Long's most powerful army of six hundred thousand had been routed. But now in the city there were only men who had escaped. As to military experience, Tie Xuan and others were no match against Zhu Di.

Zhu Di seemed also having the same idea. Unlike previously, he was no longer tentative. Rather for the first time he took the initiative to adopt an attacking position. He deployed all of his troops in columns and camped just outside of the city. He had already defeated all the more powerful enemies and grown stronger. Numerous prefectures and counties had surrendered to him. But surprisingly, the feeble city in front of him not only wouldn't surrender, but also blocked his advance!

He decided to change his tactics and attack head on. He wanted to completely subdue the

[144] In Chinese, the word literally means 'mediocracy'.

city.

Zhu Di got himself carried away. He seemed to have forgotten how he had defeated enemies stronger than him. What decided the outcome of a battle would not necessarily be more advanced weapons and more soldiers. Instead it was the will and wisdom of men.

An expert defender buries himself deep underground

Although Tie Xuan was not a professional soldier and didn't know military affairs, he was a man of intelligence and intuition. In brutal wars he was able to hone his skills and learn the essence of wars, and eventually he was elected as the guardian of the city of Jinan. In addition, Sheng Yong, experienced in military affairs, became his able aide. The combination of the two would not let Zhu Di sleep easily in the next a few years.

Once ready, Zhu Di sent his troops to attack Jinan. The northern army attacked day and night. Fighting with the soldiers, Tie Xuan personally commanded the troops atop of the city walls. His action moved the soldiers raised morale. In the eyes of the defeated, Tie Xuan was a man worthy of their trust and could be counted upon. Encouraged by Tie Xuan, the morals of the rank and file defenders were elevated and they repelled numerous attacks by Zhu Di. The northern army sojourned under the city walls and couldn't figure out what to do. Except carrying back numerous corpses, there was no progress at all.

Zhu Di was never a foolhardy man. After evaluating the terrain around Jinan, he came up with a sinister idea. He decided to open the levees and hoped to use the flood water to submerge Jinan and thus destroy the will of the defending army in the city. This was a very effective tactic. It was impossible for the defenders to fight and swim at the same time. Also the manmade flood would not be something that could be stopped using tote bags. The city seemed on the verge of being taken. But Tie Xuan didn't panic. He came up with a very clever trick, which would not only relieve the current crisis, he was also hopeful that it would finish everything for good.

Tie Xuan's plan was to first get one thousand men to feign surrender and thus hopefully to induce Zhu Di to enter the city alone to accept the surrender in order to show that he was sincere. He was convinced that surrendering in dire situation would not be suspected by Zhu Di.

Just as planned, Zhu Di took the bait and really came alone. The gate of the city of Jinan opened wide and seemed to welcome the arrival of the new owner. But in fact the defenseless city was an open-mouthed gunny bag, waiting for the prey to enter.

Just when Zhu Di, on horseback, was about to enter the city, someone inside the city called

out: "Your Highness!", which was the secret signal for action. Before the voice faded, the bag was already starting to close its mouth. All of a sudden, from above the gate an iron plate, like those seen in martial arts movies, descended down. It was designed to keep Zhu Di inside the city.

This would have been an extremely intricate design. But unfortunately the fellow who operated it was a little too anxious. The iron plate didn't enclose Zhu Di but rather hit the head of his horse. Zhu Di was startled by the iron plate falling down from the sky. Panicking, he immediately changed to another horse and escaped.

This event greatly chafed Zhu Di. Rarely did he believe someone and this time he was fooled. His not so pure heart was hurt by Tie Xuan. Thus he ordered his soldier to fiercely attack Jinan again. But the defense was still solid. Zhu Di kept attacking for three months and there was no progress at all.

To break the stalemate, Zhu Di decided to use his last secret weapon, cannon. In Ming Dynasty, cannon had been widely used in battles. In the War of Cleansing the Court, both the southern and northern armies used this weapon. But overall, the northern army's use of it was much less. The reason could be that the northern army relied mostly on cavalry and Zhu Di's tactic was sudden attacks. Such kind of tactic mandated the unwillingness and impossibility of carrying around the behemoths of several hundred jins. But now the battle was about attacking a city, then cannon would be put to use.

Now Tie Xuan had to come to face the greatest crisis since he started his defense of Jinan. At the time Tie Xuan didn't have rocket launchers and it was impossible to use blunderbusses and arrows to destroy the enemy's artillery fields. He could only watch the northern troops, while singing ditties, putting in gun powders and then lit the fuses, which sent the special presents, iron balls of various kinds, delivered to him in airborne.

Of course, a capable man is always able to find the means out of impossibilities. If Tie Xuan really couldn't find the counter measure, then the northern army would thus have taken the city. We can believe that there wouldn't be the Temple of Tie the Honorable, which is still there now, to commemorate him. By the way, I have been there to worship him, for even for the wisdom he had shown in dealing with the artillery bombardment, he would be worthy of worship by posterity.

Just when Zhu Di got the cannon and the ammunitions ready to bombard the city, what appeared above the city walls shocked him. He immediately ordered to not open fire. Because when he saw the things that were hung up above the walls, he knew that taking Jinan or not would be a trivial matter, if he opened fire and damaged these things, he would be in big trouble.

What were the things that made Zhu Di so reluctant? Tie Xuan didn't seem to have anything valuable anymore. And even if there were anything of value, all he had to do was to bombard and then enter the city, everything would be his. What was so taboo?

This was really where the absurdity was. What Tie Xuan hung up was nothing valuable but truly poisonous. Even if you beat Zhu Di to death he would not dare to open fire. Because Tie Xuan got men to make dozens of plates, on which the words "Shrine of the Great Grandfather Emperor of Great Ming" were neatly written and hung around the city walls.

These wooden plates were indeed more effective than bullet-proof vests. Zhu Di was flustered and enraged with invectives spewing but he didn't dare to do anything, which all had been predicted by Tie Xuan.

It must be known that in this world there weren't many things Zhu Di was afraid of doing. He dared to insult and was disrespectful to the emperor. He even dared to rebel openly. The plates were nothing more than just a few words written on wood. On what rational could Tie Xuan assert that Zhu Di wouldn't dare to damage these plates?

If there was a psychological war at the time, then Tie Xuan was an expert. He accurately recognized the weakness of Zhu Di, who didn't have many weak points but still he had one, which was the rational for rebellion.

Although everyone in the world knew Zhu Di was a rebel, he still had some theoretical backing, which was to obey Zhu Yuan Zhang, his father's decree to cleanse the Court and remove the treacherous officials. It was really just about using the grandfather to curb the grandson. But now Tie Xuan had hung the shrines of his father on the wall, if he used cannon to attack the city, would he be accused of daring to damage his father's shrine?

That would be something one never dared committed to doing. How could Zhu Di not know that the shrines were probably just something made from lumbers felled from the hills and written by a few fortune-tellers. There was nothing sacred about them. But there lied the irony, everyone knew these things were false but no one dared to smash them. Tie Xuan took advantage of Zhu Di's desire to remain virtuous while actually being perfidious and thus a travesty was on display.

Outside of the city Zhu Di had his cannon ready and he had strong horses and troops. If he issued the order to attack, Jinan could be taken easily. But despite his thunderous fury, he couldn't find a target for his rage and he didn't dare to open fire. On the city wall Tie Xuan ostentatiously showed his gratification. He knocked purportedly the shrine that was probably just lumbers in the woods yesterday and looked provocatively at Zhu Di, seemingly to shout in grandiloquence: "fire on me". It seemed to say: fire your cannon if you have the balls!

Zhu Di didn't have the balls to fire his cannon. He could only withdraw back to his camp. The day was probably the most mortifying and dismal in Zhu Di's military career.

The scene was later adopted in many TV series and none gave the proper credit. Here I would like to state on behalf of Mr. Tie Xuan that the original act was Mr. Tie Xuan's creation. His wisdom and the courage to play the enemy army like toys in his hands are really something worthy of our admiration.

Zhu Di finally got to taste the strength of his opponent. He was stopped by a bunch of remnants of defeated troops, a scholar who never fought any battle, and a city whose brick walls that seemed to crumble down by just a kick. This was also the first defeat since the start of his campaign.

It seems Heaven is not going to let me rule this time. I lost and Jinan doesn't belong to me, at least for now. I'd better just go back.

But even leaving wasn't an easy thing to do. In the city Tie Xuan keenly discerned the signs of Zhu Di's withdraw. He and Sheng Yong led the troops out and soundly beat a dog in despair. Zhu Di panicked and retreated for over several hundred lis. Taking advantage of the situation, Tie Xuan attacked and retook Dezhou.

At the critical moment Tie Xuan and Sheng Yong stepped up and were brave enough to face the powerful Zhu Di. They were able to achieve victory in the Defense of Jinan on their unwavering effort and resolve. They bought time for the next counterattack. They stopped an imminent collapse. For his wisdom and valor shown in this battle, Tie Xuan was also remembered as a legend by the people of Jinan.

The victory of this battle also brought some light to the chronically melancholy emperor. He promoted Tie Xuan to governor of Shandong. Later he appointed him minister of war. Thanks to Zhu Yuan Zhang's purging of meritorious generals and Li Jing Long's stupidity, a scholar without military training was put in charge of the military's highest office.

The emperor finally made a very wise decision. He relieved Li Jing Long and appointed Sheng Yong commander-in-chief. In fact for the time being, Sheng Yong was indeed the one most suitable for the job.

Meanwhile, Li Jing Long, winner of the race to flee, returned to the capital city all the way without stop. Nothing more could be said about this fellow. An army of six hundred thousand was totally lost and all that left was just himself, literally naked. Even Huang Zi Cheng, the man who originally recommended him, wanted to chop him to death. Huang Zi Cheng felt very guilty about himself and deeply resented Li Jing Long. He, along with Senior Censor Lian Zi Ning and Censor Ye Xi Xian, vehemently requested the emperor to immediately execute Li

Jing Long!

But the emperor refused their request. There seemed to be ample reasons for his refusal. Li Jing Long was a relative of his and the emperor had been always lenient and was full of love. He even cared much about his rebel uncle, how could he not care a distant relative who just suffered a defeat. In his view, Li Jing Long's defeat was already a reality and it wouldn't do much good to kill him. Keeping him alive would only cost a little grain. Why would he have to take someone's life?

But the emperor was wrong. He could never imagine that the defeated Li Jing Long actually had another role and would in the near future have an important influence to the situation at the time.

In any event, the southern army finally recovered from the delirium and confusion since the start of the war. They indeed found leaders who were able to deal with Zhu Di and started to accumulate the strength for a counterattack.

After recuperating, the reorganized southern army was ready to attack Zhu Di. The conservative Geng Bing Wen and the foolish Li Jing Long would never appear again. Zhu Di would face the most powerful line-up, consisting of the best generals in the southern army. He would also receive the most devastating defeat in his life.

Ones good at attack move at above cloud nine

Zhu Di was not someone who would sit still to get beaten. After learning Sheng Yong was preparing a northern expedition, he already made his preparations and started the attack.

In November of year two of Establishing Civility (AD 1340), Zhu Di attacked Cangzhou, which was heavily defended by the south. Tens of thousands of the southern troops were annihilated and General Xu Kai was captured. Then, without respite, Zhu Di continued his fierce attack, taking Dezhou, Jining, Linqing, and other cities.

After learning Zhu Di made the first move, Sheng Yong, the commander-in-chief, made an accurate assessment of the situation and prepared to switch to a defensive posture from an offensive one to lure the northern army to advance more. He knew small skirmishes wouldn't resolve the problem. A decisive battle with Zhu Di was inevitable.

After carefully studying the terrain, he chose Dongchang, where it would become the mass grave for the northern army, as the field for the decisive battle.

To attract Zhu Di to come forward for the decisive battle, Sheng Yong abandoned many cities to avoid the enemy's charge. He systematically organized the retreat of his troops to lure Zhu Di to continue the advance. He was convinced that the defeat in Jinan would make Zhu

Di to become more aggressive and thus he would be prone to fall into the trap he had prepared for him.

Sheng Yong's predication was correct. Zhu Di now indeed was more aggressive than usual. The defeat in Jinan made him hard to eat and sleep. Particularly, Tie Xuan's trick by hanging the shrines to force him to retreat made him feel he had been fooled. But he was also very confident. Regardless how smart Tie Xuan was, it was only about defense. The factor that really decided the outcome of a war was offense.

On offense, looking at the entire world, who dares to be against me!

It's not that he didn't see Sheng Yong's attempt, but he was confident. Since his youth, he had been in the military and taught by numerous well known generals. He had been bloody slaughters in battlefields and he vanquished numerous formidable enemies. He was very experienced in battle. The generals in the southern army were either too old or too green. They wouldn't be able to become his match.

In the southern army there was only one man, Ping An, who could rival him. This man was indeed a strong enemy. If he was the commander of the southern army, he could be tough to deal with. But luckily Zhu Yun Wen seemed to have made another mistake. He appointed Li Jing Long's deputy Sheng Yong to succeed the command and installed Ping An as Sheng Yong's deputy.

He had also searched for information on Sheng Yong, the enemy commander. Just as he expected, Sheng Yong didn't have any glaring achievements. He was originally nothing but a subordinate of Li Jing Long's. In addition, this man had one weakness, that he was not good at commanding cavalry.

In the eras of cold weaponries, cavalries were the main branch of armed forces in wars. In the past cavalries provided the primary military support in the resistance to nomad foreign invasions. In Zhu Di's era, the putatively best cavalry general was no other than Zhu Di himself. He had led armies deep inside deserts in campaigns against Northern Yuan and accumulated rich experience. He also had the pride for being an able commander and had strong soldiers. The one opposing him was the subordinate of the one he had defeated. Comparing to him, Sheng Yong was nothing but an unknown little soldier.

In Zhu Di's view, there was nothing to worry about in this battle. He was convinced that in the face to face confrontation, the elite northern cavalry would smash the enemy like splitting rotten wood, and he was destined to be the eventual winner of the battle.

In fact, everyone who certainly has shortcomings also must have something over others. Although Sheng Yong was not as capable as Zhu Di in commanding cavalry, there was a kind

of force he was good at commanding.

Zhu Di's army was still advancing forward. In December of the same year, the northern army took Donge, Dongping, and other places, and continuously moving toward Dongchang, the battlefield that had been predesignated by Sheng Yong.

In Huakou, which was not far from Dongchang, Zhu Di ran into the vanguard of Sheng Yong's force, led by General Sun Lin. It seemed to be exactly what Zhu Di predicted. Sheng Yong's force was not able to even withstand a single strike. He didn't have to exert much effort to defeat his opponent. This made him even more convinced Sheng Yong would be just like Li Jing Long and be defeated by him and would flee in disgrace. The spirited Zhu Di finally was able to come out of the shadow from the battle in Jinan. He led more than a hundred thousand troops and arrived at Dongchang, the destination for the decisive battle.

Sheng Yong was here waiting for him. There was something mysterious about the man. In *The Official History of Ming*, the first statement on Sheng Yong is: "Sheng Yong, a man of no origin". Such a comical phrase meant this was a man whose life was not known. In today's words, he was born illegally[145]. His place and date of birth and his parents were all unknown. But one thing was clear, he had suffered many defeats.

He was initially a staff officer on Geng Bing Wen's staff and was in the loss in Zhending. Then as Li Jing Long replaced Geng Bing Wen, he then was part of Li Jing Long's staff. It should be noted that under Li Jing Long, Sheng Yong also learned many things, such as how to flee when get defeated, how to choose the route of fleeing, and how to collect remnants of defeated troops.

In those one after another losing battles, he had become used to being in a role of defeated. He seemed to have spent his first two years of his military career being chased by others. Others ran, he ran, from Zhending to Beiping, then to Dezhou, and Jinan. He had been hurried around just like a duck.

To Sheng Yong, the dignity of a soldier was nothing more than just a joke. Losing, fleeing, more losing, and more fleeing, how could a man living a life like a homeless dog demand dignity?

Of course, if Sheng Yong drifted along like that, then in history there would be no *Biography of Sheng Yong*. At most his impact to history would be some words like such a general named Sheng Yong was killed in such a battle. Later facts proved he was a man of

[145] In modern China, particular since the one child policy, a couple was allowed only to have one child and having more children was considered illegal, although recently the policy has been relaxed to allow couples who both have no siblings to have two children. Children born in violation of the one-child policy were not allowed to have residence registration, thus denied most of the benefits, some of which are enumerated below.

extraordinary military talent. He didn't have the right leaders, but in those successive losses, he learned not only fleeing. Defeats also sharpened and hardened his heart. The most precious asset he acquired from those defeats was he finally was able to stand up from those glancing and questioning eyes to proclaim: "victory will eventually be mine!"

In numerous battles Sheng Yong had seen Zhu Di, whose speedy attacks and penetration, the suddenness in opportunity selection and accurate assessment to the battle situation impressed him. Every time he saw Zhu Di's figure, advancing in front of his soldiers and leading his elite cavalry troops roaming around with no one to stop him, he sighed and wondered: Can this man be defeated?

From those defeats, Sheng Yong never stopped to learn the lessons and get something out of them. Gradually he came to understand Zhu Di's tactics and methods of attack, which featured using cavalry to strike the flanks and collaborated with frontal assaults. After the defeat at the White Gorge River, he fled to Jinan and met the non-military man Tie Xuan. At that crucial moment, working together with Tie Xuan, he finally defeated Zhu Di's army for the first time. This made him recognize Zhu Di was someone that could be defeated.

After a careful planning, he created a unique battle plan specifically designed to counter Zhu Di's method of attack. He designated Dongchang as the place of battle and was ready to oppose Zhu Di. In fact Sheng Yong knew clearly the victory in Jinan was somewhat by chance. It would be very difficult to defeat Zhu Di in an open field battle. The northern army commanded by Zhu Di had always been using cavalry as its main strike force. They campaigned against Mongols many times and were extremely good at open field battles. Sheng Yong, just as Zhu Di foresaw, was not a good cavalry commander. But he was courageous enough to face Zhu Di, because he had his own secret weapons and strategies that he was very good at.

His sentinels already reported the news that Zhu Di had arrived in Dongchang. Sheng Yong knew he finally had to face the dreadful enemy. In this battle, he didn't have to report the situations to anyone else. But it wasn't necessarily a good thing because all the responsibilities and heavy burdens were on him. He had no one to depend on.

Unexpected by Sheng Yong's generals, he didn't opt to hold the city. Like Sheng Yong, the generals all had had enough of Zhu Di's wrath in numerous defeats and knew his ferocity. They were somewhat timorous to face Zhu Di in head on battles. When Sheng Yong announced he would line up the troops and fight in front of the city, his generals were in an uproar, arguments then ensued.

Sheng Yong didn't say anything. Rather he quietly looked at his generals. Gradually the generals calmed down. Finally Sheng Yong spoke: "I believe no one is a coward. The Prince of

Yan is indeed formidable. But is it going to end if we are only able to hold the city and allow him to ravage us and then march off, and we are pushed around? I ask each of you to work together and fight him in a decisive battle. Although the outcome is not certain, our devotions and deeds will be certainly remembered by history!"

Fighting with the city behind, there would be no retreat but advance, no death but live! No more fleeing. Even just for upholding the dignity of a soldier, one must fight until death!

Zhu Di, you'll taste the wrath of me, an unknown little soldier!

The decisive Battle at Dongchang

Zhu Di came to Dongchang with his elite troops and started the decisive battle against Sheng Yong. Just as he predicted, the cavalry in Sheng Yong's army numbered few and also was of inferior quality. But the soldiers were armed with another kind of weaponry, fire arms and crossbows.

Sheng Yong understood very well that to defeat Zhu Di in a cavalry charge was like an idiot's dream. Thus he took advantage of his strength by arming his troops with fire arms and crossbows. To increase the potency, he also ordered to poison the arrow heads to not allow time for the wounded soldiers waiting for ambulances. The aim was to kill by just one hit.

Zhu Di saw the formation and finally understood the enemy didn't come with a kind heart. But the arrow was already mounted on the bow and it had to be launched. Let's see which are faster, your crossbows or my elite cavalry!

Zhu Di gave the order and led the cavalry charge. Just like before, his target of attack was the left flank of Sheng Yong's army. But despite his all-out attack, the left flank didn't flinch. Zhu Di charged again and again with no avail.

Sheng Yong was well prepared for this thread bare tactic of Zhu Di's. He not only strengthened his own left flank, but also designed a trap that Zhu Di could never dream of. He decided to take advantage of the situation and Zhu Di's unique way of attacking to completely defeat Zhu Di.

Failing the attack, Zhu Di timely adjusted troop deployment. He decided to change the point of attack to the center of Sheng Yong's army in the hope of smashing the entire line of the defense. He reorganized his troops and moved toward the center in preparation for a fatal blow. But he could never think that just as when he was dashingly organizing his army for the attack, he and his army were already at the mouth of Sheng Yong's gunny sack.

Very soon, Zhu Di led his cavalry on a charge of the largest scale. Just as he expected, Sheng Yong's center collapsed and men rank back as soon as they met. Zhu Di was ecstatic

and ordered the whole army to pursue the enemy. But not soon after he was in the chase, Zhu Di surprisingly found out that the further he advanced the more southern troops. Also they didn't appear to look like the soldiers that just ran away, they all had fire arms and crossbows and were aiming at his men.

A flash of idea appeared in Zhu Di's mind, "I've been fooled!"

This was exactly Sheng Yong's plan. He was sure that after failing to attack the left flank, Zhu Di would turn to the center. Thus he planned a trap, which was to order the forces in the middle to retreat if Zhu Di attacked. Then after Zhu Di was surrounded, the trap would be closed and an all-out attack would be launched.

Zhu Di was in a crisis again. This time he could not fool the enemy's commander like at the Battle of the White Gorge River. Sheng Yong was not Li Jing Long. Also Zhu Di was already bagged. Even if he broke his whip whipping his horse, it would be of no avail.

A rescue

Outside of the encirclement, there were still many of Zhu Di's troops. But because their commander was encircled, no one knew what to do. Experience tells us that at crucial moments, there were always heroes on the scene. This time the one playing the hero was Zhu Neng.

He followed Zhu Di closely to attack the southern troops, but after a dazzling change of the formation, he noticed he had lost his commander. This would not do, if he couldn't find the man, there was the danger that the whole army would collapse!

As soon as he learned Zhu Di had been trapped, he immediately commanded his unit to charge the southern army's encirclement. This man was that rare kind of loyal and courageous men, as well as a well-known dare devil. Previously he had the glorious record of leading just over thirty men to chase an army of over ten thousand. This time he also didn't disappoint Zhu Di. After some search, he managed to find Zhu Di in the melee and broke out of the heavy encirclement with him.

Now commanding at a distance, Sheng Yong was furious. He couldn't imagine Zhu Di still managed to jump off the trap that he had carefully planned. Well, if Zhu Di escaped, then let's attack the northern troops, none of them will be allowed to slip out!

If there is a loss, then somewhere else there's a gain. Although the trap designed by Sheng Yong didn't ensnare Zhu Di, it got another man.

After Zhu Di was encircled, Zhu Neng was not the only man fretting, among them, Zhang Yu was another one. He was well recognized as the top among the generals of Zhu Di's. In

past battles, he always led ahead of his soldiers and made great achievements. His friendship with Zhu Di was close and deep. When he saw his beloved leader was trapped, Zhang Yu followed Zhu Neng and also charged into the encirclement.

After an arduous fight, Zhang Yu finally made into the circle. But what he saw was not Zhu Di, but the smile of Death.

Now Zhu Di was already rescued by Zhu Neng. But when the maddened southern troops saw the duck at hand had flown away, they needed to find someone to release their anger. The appearance of Zhang Yu satisfied their wish. All of them rushed up. One man, one cut, Zhang Yu was chopped to pieces. Now the generals, who had been chased around by Zhu Di, all realized this was the time to take their revenge. They didn't need Sheng Yong's encouragement. They fought hard to chase and kill the beaten dogs. The northern army collapsed and was routed.

Chapter Thirty

Only One Step Away From Victory

Aphorisms say, just when a roof is leaking there is also an overnight rain, and a broken drum is always beaten by ten thousand. Just as the whole army was being routed, Ping An, another nemesis of Zhu Di's, rushed to the scene with his troops. He joined Sheng Yong's forces and chased Zhu Di all around. Zhu Di, who had never suffered a defeat in his life, was now defeated by an unknown little soldier.

The Battle of Dongchang made Sheng Yong a celebrity. He wasn't afraid of a powerful enemy and courageously and steadfastly challenged Zhu Di, the best general of the time. To some extent, it was he who invalidated the myth that Zhu Di was undefeatable. Zhu Di also learned the ferocity of the unknown little soldier. In this battle, most of the elite northern troops that he had meticulously trained were annihilated and the loss was deep.

In a battle knives and swords don't have eyes, thus no one was absolutely immune from harm. Even Sheng Yong, the commander of the army on the victorious side, was exposed to the danger of being hit by an arrow from the northern army. Ironically, although in this battle Shen Yong employed large numbers of fire arms and crossbows and almost completely annihilated Zhu Di's northern army, in this battle, the one who was safest was Zhu Di, the commander of the defeated army. Regardless how fierce were the southern troops, the fire arms and crossbows dared not to be summoned to Zhu Di's body. This was why Zhu Di got spared in the melee.

The one who created the rare scene was no other than Zhu Di's nemesis, Zhu Yun Wen. It was his order that Zhu Di was not to be harmed allowed Zhu Di to escape from death for numerous times. The soldiers in the battle were not idiots. They understood the pros and cons hidden in it.

Zhu Di and Zhu Yun Wen were uncle and nephew. Despite now the two faced each other in arms and the nature of the confrontation was between enemies, one day the two could decide to end the fight and a conference of reconciliation of kinsmen would be held, then the nature of the confrontation would be changed to among their own people. If that happened it

would not be good. Zhu Di probably would still be conferred as a prince and could at spare time write a biography. In it he would remember that in such a year, such a month, and on such a day, such a man knifed me or shot me with an arrow in such a battle. Although by that time Zhu Di might not be so satisfied with his career, it would still be easy for him to do something to a little soldier.

Out of this consideration by the soldiers, Zhu Di was spared in ruckus battles. The most crucial consequence of Zhu Yun Wen's order lied not in itself that Zhu Di was not to be harmed, but rather in the sense that many southern generals and soldiers saw there was the possibility that the two might reconcile. The enemy facing them now might one day later be their master. There weren't really that many people who would want to do something that might not be rewarded for being the one who killed Zhu Di.

Zhu Yun Wen was indeed not a qualified politician. Before the battle, he caringly donned a heavy bullet proof vest on his enemy. Then he encouraged his opponent to attack him. If one fought like this, there was no reason for him not to be defeated!

You suffer if you don't take what Heaven has offered to you.

Zhu Di, wearing the bullet proof armor, returned to Beiping. Although he didn't suffer much in this battle, his elite northern army he had meticulously trained was almost completely annihilated. This was his biggest loss. Now the northern army also finally understood they were not an army that would be always victorious in the world. Their adversary the southern army was also very strong and capable. The defeat at the decisive battle of Dongchang also brought the moral to the lowest point.

As usual, the depressed Zhu Di went to see his advisor Dao Yan to find the strategy for a response. But this time he was no longer cordial and respectful anymore. He was irate without reason when he saw the monk in front of him. If it was not the monk, he would not have resolutely embarked on this road of no return. Now it was too late to say anything else. He had to ask the monk what to do next.

Dao Yan was not as exasperated as Zhu Di. To him, the game was just starting.

Calmly he told Zhu Di it would not do to turn back. The most critical thing to do was to at once to raise the moral and get ready for the next battle.

The northern army just suffered a major defeat. It was easy to say than done to talk about restoring the moral. But Dao Yan seemed to always have some ideas. He provided a man, Zhang Yu, whom could be used by Zhu Di to create a mawkish story.

Zhang Yu had the reputation of being Zhu Di's top general and was highly esteemed. Zhu Di was also deeply saddened by his death. Thus making use of the opportunity, he held a

funeral for Zhang Yu with all the grandeur. He also ordered all of his men to attend it. Because Zhang Yu died in the midst of battle, there was probably no corpse, thus there was no ceremony to bid farewell to the body. But Zhu Di still did his best. He personally wrote the obituary for Zhang Yu and undressed and burned his attire in front of the men to express his grief. He had a lot of clothes but the act moved many people at the scene. They wept and expressed their willingness to continue the fight to avenge Zhang Yu's death.

With his stellar performance, Zhu Di told every one of us a truth: a dead man is usually much easier to use than a living man.

No more retreat

Having completed the performance, the tired Zhu Di sat in the chair and looked at the meditating Dao Yan. Although the eccentric monk had followed him for more than a dozen years, he still thought this was a strange man. The monk never wanted to live a peaceful life. All he wanted was rebellion. Even more strange, regardless of how crucial the situation he was in, he always remained calm and easy.

A truly strange man!

Zhu Di took a deep breath. Ever since the start of the rebellion, he now truly felt how hard it was to be on the road to become the Son of Heaven. To obtain the supreme glory, one must pay an extremely high price. Although he had unmatched military and political talent, he still had to travail with extreme difficulty. This defeat also once again seriously reminded him that the road ahead was full of treachery.

Zhu Di seemed to have grown tired of this kind of life. He lived every day in fear and terror, when was it going to end?

Once again he looked at Dao Yan, who was sitting across from him. The man who started it all seemed to have become someone outside of this matter. He shook his head and said to Dao Yan with a mirthless smile: "This effort to cleanse the Court has been so difficulty. I am totally unprepared for it. It won't be necessarily a bad thing if I go out with the master to become a monk."

Upon hearing these words, Dao Yan, who thus far had been meditating with his eyes closed, rose suddenly. He walked across to Zhu Di and didn't salute him like before but rather did something unexpected.

He suddenly grabbed Zhu Di's collar and almost shouted to him: "Your Highness, there is no way back! We have committed treason. We are treacherous traitors. If we lose, death is our only end!"

Zhu Di was in shock. It was not that he didn't understand the meaning of these words. He also understood there was only death in the end if he lost. But he still didn't want to face the cruel reality, that if he couldn't be the Son of Heaven he would also not be able to remain a man anymore.

Being terribly stared at by Dao Yan, Zhu Di lowered his head with a reluctant expression on his face. After a while, he raised his head again and the usual cold and stern expression has been restored on his face.

"Yes, you are right. We cannot retreat."

Battle against Sheng Yong again

The Battle of Dongchang established Sheng Yong's reputation. The general who grew up in defeats finally achieved a real success. Zhu Yun Wen was ecstatic and decided to pay a tribute at the imperial temple. Maybe the reason for paying the tribute to his grandfather Zhu Yuan Zhang was no more than just telling him that his grandson Zhu Yun Wen had defeated his son Zhu Di. It is hard to imagine how Zhu Yuan Zhang in heaven would have felt.

With the result of this battle, Sheng Yong also affirmed his status as the commander-in-chief. Zhu Yun Wen finally handed the army to the right commander. But unfortunately, the timing was no longer right. The best opportunity to destroy Zhu Di had been missed by Li Jing Long. Although Zhu Di's main force was damaged, the strength remained. He would eventually meet Sheng Yong again on the battlefields and he would not underestimate his enemy again.

In March of year three of Establishing Civility (AD 1341), Sheng Yong, followed by an army of two hundred thousand, met Zhu Di's army again at Jia River. In here he would challenge Zhu Di for the second time.

Zhu Di dared not to underestimate his opponent again. Obviously Sheng Yong had thoroughly studied the features of his attacks and found a set of effective countermeasures to oppose him. On the contrary, he didn't know Sheng Yong. Zhu Di knew the only way to achieve one hundred victories in one hundred battles was to know himself and his enemy well. That required detailed reconnaissance about enemy formation and deployments and find the weak point.

But the problem was Sheng Yong was good at using fire arms and crossbows. If cavalry were sent to reconnoiter, they would be shot to sieves even before they could get close. But if they didn't know the information about the enemy, there would be little chance for a victory. A flash of idea appeared in Zhu Di's mind. He decided to use a loophole in rules of

engagement in battles to send his own death squad to do the reconnaissance.

Men received this assignment must be really people dared to face death because the probability of death was very high. But the squad sent out by Zhu Di didn't have to worry about this. The man who led the squad was Zhu Di himself and on his body he wore the bullet proof armor that had been personally prepared by Zhu Yun Wen.

At the early morning the next day, Sheng Yong appeared in full body armor. His formation was no different from that of the last time. Shields were deployed in the front and on the left and right flanks to prevent the raids of the northern troops. A lot of fire arms and crossbows were ready to fire at the northern cavalry.

In the center Sheng Yong was observing the movement of the enemy. Soon, just as he expected, the vanguard of the enemy cavalry rushed onward. But surprisingly, the man who led the charge was Zhu Di!

Many times he dreamed of capturing Zhu Di to vindicate the humiliation of previous defeats. Now the man even dared to charge to him by himself. A great deed was about to be accomplished!

But Zhu Di didn't get close to his formation but rather just swept pass. Obviously his purpose was to reconnoiter. But now Sheng Yong finally realized there wasn't much he could do about Zhu Di! The best response to this kind of reconnoitering by cavalry was to fire on them and shoot them. But the inculcation of His Majesty the emperor was still lingering in his ears. Under no circumstance could they fire or shoot arrows, which would burden the benevolent His Majesty the emperor with the crime of killing his uncle.

For numerous times Sheng Yong had suspicions about the applicability and feasibility of the nearly idiotic benevolence of the emperor. Although it was unbearable for him to suffer from the extreme pain and loss of being in a position that he could see something but not touch something, he still didn't dare to disobey the order. All he could do was to send his cavalry to chase the enemy. Of course the result was to no avail.

Cladded in bullet proof armor, Zhu Di reviewed Sheng Yong's troops in high fashion. Although everyone in the formation looked at him angrily and scolded him loudly, he still easily finished the review. In this combat system, Zhu Di was a cheater in abusing the rules. But he first had to thank Zhu Yun Wen, who was the maker of the stupid system.

Having finished the reconnaissance, Zhu Di didn't find a better method of attack. He couldn't find any weak spot in the formation. He couldn't get any advantage regardless the direction of the attack. Sheng Yong didn't earn his reputation by vainglory. The man grasped the essence of military affairs. Zhu Di made a round ostentatiously but that was nothing more

than just a victory in spirit. Sheng Yong was still there waiting for him.

After some careful deliberation, Zhu Di still opted to attack the left flank of the enemy's formation. In fact in this action, Zhu Di just wanted to probe the enemy and he wasn't fully committed to the attack. But his subordinate didn't think that way. Thus something unexpected by Zhu Di occurred.

As Zhu Di launched a probing attack, his general Tan Yuan saw the raging battle on the left flank. Perhaps he didn't have good eyesight and he was too hyper, he thought that was the start of the main attack. Thus he immediately committed his unit to the attack. But not until he arrived at the enemy formation, did he find out that he now was playing a main role, instead of an extra.

In the center Sheng Yong clearly saw the situation. He immediately ordered General Zhuang De to lead his rear army to join the attack on Tan Yuan. In the southern army Zhuang De had the reputation for being brave and fierce. Taking Sheng Yong's order he launched a pincer attack to Tan Yuan, who was not prepared for this and killed by Zhuang De.

Tan Yuan was a worrier in the northern army second only to Zhang Yu and Zhu Neng. His death was a major blow to the northern army. But Zhu Di once again utilized his skill at using a dead man. He quickly turned griefs to strength and took advantage of the momentary confusion in the southern army caused by Tan Yuan's action to launch the general attack!

Sheng Yong was a cautious general. His main strategy was defense and then counterattack, which was just the right method to suppress Zhu Di's lightening flanking attacks. Before knowing for sure Zhu Di's strategy for attack, he would not launch an attack. But the mistaken assessment by the simpleton Tan Yuan made him to move the center to jointly fight him. He defeated the northern troops but in the meantime also exposed a flaw, although it was just a momentary flaw.

If the enemy he faced was an ordinary man, it would have been all right. But unfortunately his enemy was Zhu Di.

Zhu Di was a natural born combat animal. His ability in grasping opportunities was as acute as a sharks' ability in sensing blood. A fleeting opportunity that was brought on with Tan Yuan's life was firmly grasped by Zhu Di!

It was getting dark. Raiding in darkness was just the strength of Zhu Di's. He immediately led Zhu Neng and Zhang Wu and others on a ferocious attack to the gap that appeared in the rear of the southern army. Rushed by the cavalry, the formation of the southern army collapsed. General Zhuang De, who had just killed Tan Yuan, was also among the dead. He probably never thought that glory and death could get so close to each other.

But Sheng Yong was really good. In time he stabilized the formation and repelled Zhu Di's cavalry attack. Zhu Di quickly saw the recovery of the southern army's formation and recognized the battle couldn't be continued anymore. Thus he decided to withdraw.

Society Youth Zhu Di once again played a cheating game. Taking advantage of his bullet proof vest, he thus led a few cavalry men to guard the rear and went away safely. He would later continue to use this trick and use it as one of the most important capital in his pursuit of victory.

It was not that the foolish Zhu Yun Wen didn't understand Zhu Di, the uncle of his. To some extent, Zhu Di was a cad, who would use any means so long as he could achieve his goals. Zhu Yun Wen's biggest mistake was not that he didn't know that to deal with cads, one had to use roguish methods.

Having returned to the camp, Zhu Di summoned his generals for a conference. But the mood was depressing. The generals were all very experienced. They could all see it was very difficult to win over their opponent. Sheng Yong, the previously defeated and unknown little general, was indeed very capable. Thinking of the road ahead, they were unsure if they would lose their heads the next day. These generals, who usually boasted about sweeping away the southern army and fighting all the way to the capital city as soon as they opened their mouth, were now all mum.

No one said anything. Because they all knew at such a crucial moment, the one who should say something was Zhu Di, the one who brought all of them to embark on this treacherous mission.

Amidst the unbearable silence, Zhu Di finally spoke. He smiled and said in a light hearted tune: "The reason Tan Yuan's attack failed was because his timing was not right. Now the two armies are facing each other. Our army is more mobile. If we can find a gap in enemy's formation and we fight with valor, we will certainly be able to defeat the enemy!"

Upon hearing these words, the spirts of the generals were elevated a bit. Sensing the mood change, Zhu Di drew out his sword and shouted: "If the Emperor Martial Glory Liu Xiu[146] was so brave that he led only a thousand men to break through Wang Xun's army of more than a hundred thousand, what do we have to be afraid of? When two armies meet in a battle, the brave one wins!"

He ended his peroration and confidently looked at each one. He was sure he would be able to prop up the courage of the generals.

He did. Those who initially lost their hope for a victory now gathered around him again.

[146] Liu Xiu was the founding emperor of the Eastern Han Dynasty.

Just like they believed in this man three years ago, they were convinced this man was the true Son of Heaven and would be able to lead them to the final victory.

But the problem was, did Zhu Di believe in himself?

Fear

The generals returned to their camps. They had to prepare for the big battle tomorrow. Then they could rejoice on the dream that this would be the last battle in their life. But Zhu Di couldn't sleep, for he knew better than anyone else that he wasn't certain about a sure victory. It was easy to encourage others with those exciting words, superstitions, and if necessary, squeeze out a few drops of tear, which would be enough to make the pawns to fight with their lives.

But he couldn't encourage himself, absolutely not. He knew better than anyone else what kind of person he was. All those words about the Son of Heaven and Bestowed by Heaven were just bullshit. All it took would be for Sheng Yong to make a slight circling movement with big sharp knife on his neck and he would be just like anyone else to leave a big scare and for sure forever that a second head would not grow out of it.

Sheng Yong was just too dreadful. He knew him too well. His formation was so perfect and the terrible fire arms and crossbows were enough to shoot anyone who attacked it into a porcupine. Except fighting hard and charge to the formation, there didn't seem a better way to subdue the enemy. He was surely a Liu Xiu, but Sheng Yong was absolutely not the foolish Wang Xun.

It's been three years. It was truly a too arduous road. There wasn't one day he could sleep in peace. There wasn't one day that his thought was free of worries. Day after day there were those castigating essays from the sharp tongued Fang Xiao Ru. One after another were the rebellion suppressing armies, the disdainful looks of the people, and the glorious title "traitor" lingering in people's mouths every day.

But all these were not the things Zhu Di feared the most. His real fear was failure. Even if all the people in the world were against him, as long as he succeeded in rebellion, there surely would be men to worship him. But the problem was, could he really be successful? He defeated numerous enemies, but there appeared many more and even more formidable enemies. Victory was too far away and too far to achieve! Was this the kind of life he wanted, to live every day in fear and then to face the unknown fate tomorrow?

Sitting in the dark, Zhu Di meditated. But meditation wouldn't solve any problem. Things were already in a situation where they were and there was no use to remain fearful. Fate

would eventually come. One should bravely welcome the coming Fate. He stood up, walked out of the camp, and stared at the endless dark sky.

It's almost dawn.

Winning the lottery for the second time

This was another sunny day. Accompanied by the sound of flowing water, the clear water in the river rushed ceaselessly. The green grasses of early spring were already sprouting. But for the moment at this place men weren't in the mood to enjoy the scenery. Clad in armor with knives and swords in hand, they would commence the second fight.

Before the battle started, the two sides deployed their forces into formations. The northern army formed at the northeast and the southern army on the southwest. Probably the orientation of the formations was unintentional and there was nothing unusual. But probably even Zhu Di wasn't aware that it was the orientation of the formations that decided the outcome of the battle.

Once again Zhu Di attacked first. He changed his previous strategy and led his cavalry to attack Sheng Yong's army on both flanks at the same time. The purpose was nothing but to make Sheng Yong to have to take care of both sides. Then he would find some gaps to attack. Zhu Di conjured up a good plan, but Sheng Yong, the shrewd business man, ensured Zhu Di to miss his calculation.

Sheng Yong had already predicted Zhu Di's plan. Both flanks of his army were very strong and didn't leave any chance to the northern army. Although the northern troops charged with valor, they still weren't able to break through Sheng Yong's formation. Both sides fought for a long time and there was no clear winner. But the moods of the commanders of the two armies were completely different.

Sheng Yong was not anxious. His original plan was to use strong formations to wear down the northern troops and then launch the attack. The longer it stayed in stalemate, the more advantageous to him. But Zhu Di was different, what he led was a mobile cavalry army but wasn't a mechanized tank force. The mobility of a cavalry army was decided by men and horses and both needed to be fed and plenty of rest. It wouldn't do to drink gasoline. If they settled in a stalemate, they couldn't sustain.

Although Zhu Di knew this, he could do nothing to change it. Sheng Yong was like a turtle curling in its shell, it would not expose its head regardless how hard Zhu Di attacked it. Once a while, it would counter with a bite. With this kind of enemy, Zhu Di could do nothing.

The two sides, one on the offense and the other on the defense, consumed the time and

men's lives. The battle was in a full stalemate. Both Zhu Di and Sheng Yong exerted their full strength to maintain the battle. They knew any kind of stalemate would eventually have a moment of break. It was all about who could sustain it.

Both were right and the moment to break the stalemate finally arrived. But it came in a way that both of them didn't expect.

What ensued was once again an eerie event. The scene was like this: "Initially it was a sunny and cloudless day. All of a sudden the sky and ground changed the color. Stones and sand were blown and devilish wind came up everywhere!" This description seems to be very familiar. Indeed, this description was used in describing the Battle of the White Gorge River. I am using the description again here because in my ability I can never explain why the devilish wind would always blow at the most crucial moment and place. In all likelihood both sides didn't have the technology for weather forecast and big wind turbines had not been invented and the battlefield was also not something any side could choose. Thus it is certain that human factors can be excluded. All we can do is to be amazed: This is a magical world.

Not only did the wind blow, it was also from the northeast. It was truly an act of the devil. Facing the wind, the southern troops couldn't even open their eyes, not to mention to fight. The northern troops trounced them like chasing ducks. Seeing the situation was not good, Sheng Yong collected his men and horses and fled. He seemed to have recognized that Heaven was not on his side.

Taking advantage of the opportunity presented, Zhu Di launched the general attack to the southern army and at the end defeated Sheng Yong. This was the second time he won the lottery. In both times it was wind that helped him. Probably Zhu Di also thought he was blessed by Heaven.

The defeated Sheng Yong didn't have to feel ashamed for the defeat. He did his best and also should have learned much from this battle. He could have deservingly shouted to the sky something like this: "Heaven wants to destroy me, and it's not the fault of the fight!", because it was the truth. The frequent appearance of sandstorms and the consequences also showed us that environment protection is indeed a serious problem. Sometimes it could morph itself into a serious military and political issue.

The victory at the Battle of Jia River greatly improved the moral of Zhu Di's army. Wu Jie and Ping An's forces, who were initially tasked to act as reserves for Sheng Yong's army, fled upon hearing the news of Sheng Yong's defeat. They turned to garrison Zhending. The war situation once again was tilting on Zhu Di's side.

Carrying on his zeal to continue the fight, and kept on his usual strategic thinking of not

being open but using intrigues, Zhu Di lured out the garrison in Zhending out for a fight. Wu Jie, surely enough, took the bait and fought against Zhu Di again at the Hutuo River. In this battle, Zhu Di took full advantage of his bullet proof vest and again at the most crucial moment of the battle got the help from the wind. With the wind, he defeated Wu Jie's army.

There is no need to describe the battle in great detail, simply because this battle bore so many similarities to the previous one. The War of Cleansing the Court was ferocious. The military tactics and strategies emerged in the war were also worthy our careful analysis. But the two un-war-like factors in this war were more interesting.

The first factor was the diehard Zhu Di. It was truly unbelievable that the fellow also became a never die superhero in American blockbuster movies. He had fought numerous battles, charged into enemy formations, and was never seriously wounded. Everyone knows swords and knives don't have eyes. Generals who led charges and common soldiers had basically the same kind of chances of being killed. But Zhu Di's superiority was not from his superhuman capabilities, but rather because his enemy Zhu Yun Wen's foolish order, that his men were prohibited from harming him. This kind of unfair match was truly dull.

The second factor was the never ceasing wind. It was normal that there were more sandstorms in the north. The problem was the place and time of the wind blowing. At every time it didn't blow early or late, but just at the moment when the two armies were at the height of the battle. The north was a large region but wind and sand just liked that small area of the battlefield. What is more unbelievable was that every time the wind blew, it blew in a direction advantageous to Zhu Di. It either broke the enemy commander's banner or in the face of the southern troops so that they couldn't even open their eyes. I once speculated if Zhu Di had invented some blower kind of gadgets so that he could blow at will and blow whatever way he wanted. Without the effect of the two factors above, crops would probably have been growing atop of Zhu Di's tomb.

It was a strange war, the War of Cleansing the Court.

Creative thinking

The triumphant Zhu Di still couldn't relax because his territory was still very small and his troops were still not many. After winning the battle against Wu Jie, he had more battles and got some wins. In addition in Peixian of Xuzhou he also burned large quantities of southern army's provisions and thus cut off the enemy's supply. Zhu Di initially wanted to ride on the success to continue, but the southern army was already prepared. Generals from Hebei and Shanxi areas also came out to attack Zhu Di's home base Beiping. To guard his home, Zhu Di had to withdraw back.

Now Zhu Di finally felt the unprecedented pressure, which was not the result of the loss of a battle, but his subtle feeling that his adventure this time seemed to be impossible to succeed. Zhu Yun Wen occupied the larger areas of the country but his territory was just limited to three counties of Beiping, Baoding, and Yongping. On man power and provisions he was far inferior to Zhu Yun Wen. Although he won battle after battle, he had no means to completely defeat his opponent.

Zhu Di began to see if the war continued on that way, some day he would be captured by some enemy soldiers along with his dwindling number of men from battle attrition. He would be arrested as a reward and then to live or die in disgrace.

Failure was not a big deal. Loss of hope meant the greatest pain.

The fire of hope that had supported Zhu Di now seemed to be dying out. Was there any hope? In those years there weren't many in the real estate business and there weren't that many construction sites. He couldn't hope that Zhu Yun Wen would die from being hit by a falling brick. In addition, even if Zhu Yun Wen died, the throne would still not be his. What could he do!

Just at the moment, a piece of news changed Zhu Di's fortune. The information was provided by the eunuch informants in the palace. They sent men to deliver the information to Zhu Di. They indicated that there were very few troops in the capital. If he entered it when it was unguarded, he would succeed in one battle.

This was an extremely important piece of news. But when Zhu Di read it, he was greatly irritated. Why? Zhu Di was not in the area of Suzhou or Hangzhou. It was easier said than done to fight from Beiping all the way to the capital! He had already fought for three years just for this purpose. But the problem was Zhu Yun Wen wouldn't yield a way for him to fight to the capital.

On the way to the capital, the biggest obstacle was Shandong. The people of this area were militant and soldiers fought bravely. In addition, it was garrisoned by well-known generals. Regardless, it would be tough to fight through this area. To Zhu Di, this was really an insurmountable obstacle. But did the obstacle really exist?

Zhu Di wouldn't have thought unconsciously he had tipped himself into a mind trap. Must he travel through Shandong if he wanted to go to the capital?

There are often blind spots in our thought processes. Creative thinking is designed to eliminate these blind spots. The so-called creative thinking doesn't necessarily mean someone has to come up with some brilliant ideas. In many times, the solutions proposed using this kind of thinking are already known to many people. But the problem is they all have not

recognized these solutions. We can use a real historical example to illustrate this problem:

The event took place in America. The United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration found that one of the parts used in the space shuttle often broke. It broke either here or there and many human and material resources were spent on it and no solution was found. Finally an engineer asked if the part was really needed. In fact, the part was indeed unnecessary.

This ironic incident showed us that in our minds, there are some blind spots. We often trap ourselves in a predicament from which we can't extricate ourselves. To Zhu Di, Shandong was his blind spot. Because the defeat in Jinan left too deep an impression on him, he seemed to think that he would not be able to take the capital without taking Jinan.

If Zhu Di kept toiling this way, he would inevitably fail. But at the crucial moment a man with better thinking ability inspired him. The man was Dao Yan.

There was a reason for Dao Yan being recognized as the best advisor of the time. He didn't just follow the books or dwell on some established ideas. He was flexible. He keenly saw the blind spot in Zhu Di's thinking.

Zhu Di was just like a skilled thief wanting to enter a room to steal. He was good at cracking locks but regardless of his efforts, the lock of Jinan couldn't be cracked. Regardless how many universal keys were used they just didn't work. Now the old thief Dao Yan came to his side and told him his real purpose was not to open the lock, but rather to enter the room and what stood in front of him was nothing but a wooden door.

Thus Zhu Di gave up the attempt to crack the lock. He lifted his foot and kicked the door open.

The door was open and the road to the capital was open. Zhu Di finally saw the end of the road to becoming the Son of Heaven, the glinting throne.

On the map, the name of the door was Xuzhou.

In December of year three of Establishing Civility (AD 1401), once again in his traveling palace Zhu Di donned on his armor again. He summoned his generals to prepare to depart. But the purpose of the attack this time was different from the previous ones. Zhu Di had made up his mind that this would be his last attack. He looked at his generals. After years of expeditions and battles, the men close to him died one after another, among many of them were Zhang Yu and Tan Yuan. But he always came back to the same starting point. Rather than grinding to death, he would strike hard in one exertion!

"We have fought for many years and when is this going to end? This time will be the final push. There will be no return, we either live or die!"

Success, or in martyrdom!

The final charge

In January of year four of Establishing Civility (AD 1402), Zhu Di commenced his final charge. His old nemesis Sheng Yong, Ping An, and Tie Xuan all got the news and repaired the city walls to wait for Zhu Di's assault. But the development of the events greatly surprised them. Zhu Di didn't bother them but rather took the route via Guantao to cross the Yellow River. He successively took Donge, Dongping, and Shanxian. His army was heading toward Xuzhou!

Sheng Yong and Tie Xuan panicked. They understood Zhu Di's purpose. His target was neither Dezhou nor Jinan, but the final destination, the capital. If Zhu Di was successful, everything would be over. Thus they abandoned their usual defensive posture and started pursuing Zhu Di.

The first one who caught up was Ping An. He led forty thousand men on Zhu Di's trail. He was very fast. Ping An thought although Zhu Di launched a surprise attack, at least Xuzhou was heavily fortified and would be able to sustain the northern army's attack. At least it could create a delay so that they could attack and destroy the northern army from both inside and outside. But he could never expect that Zhu Di didn't attack Xuzhou!

After being defeated, the city garrison opted to stay inside and wouldn't come out, with the attempt to stick it out. But Zhu Di played an even better trick. He detoured away from Xuzhou and turned to attack Suzhou[147]. Learning the news, Ping An was shocked. Zhu Di didn't even care about Xuzhou, obviously his only target was the capital!

Zhu Di was like a bull charging with his tail on fire. He cared nothing but advancing toward his target. An enemy who risks everything is the most terrifying enemy.

Catch him up, must catch him up!

In March, Ping An got the news that Zhu Di had left Xuzhou and was advancing toward Suzhou. Seeing the northern army's swift movement, Ping An ordered a forced march of his troops and finally they were able to catch up with the enemy at the Fei River near Suzhou. In his view, Zhu Di was rushing toward the capital and wouldn't want to linger long. If he was able to catch up with the northern army, it meant victory.

But Ping An could never imagine that Zhu Di, who was running forward, didn't actually

[147] This is not the Suzhou in Zhejiang province, this one is in Anhui. The Chinese characters are different but they have the same pronunciation.

forget him. Zhu Di already prepared presents for him at the Fei River, taking the opportunity to thank Ping An for leading his army to send him off.

Breathing heavily, when Ping An ran up to the Fei River, he was immediately ambushed by Zhu Di. Actually, in order to cut off the annoying tail, Zhu Di had been waiting here for two days. As soon as Ping An's army arrived, attack was launched. Ping An didn't expect Zhu Di, whom he had been chasing for a month, would be here waiting for him. The entire army was caught completely off guard and routed. Ping An's reaction was swift. He immediately reined up his horse to continue his race. The only difference was the direction of the race was different. Remnants of his army followed him. It seemed in this month Ping An's main work was to race unceasingly up and down.

Although Zhu Di's attack routed Ping An, it also reduced his army's speed. In the meantime the southern army completed its deployment for the chase and regrouped and was catching up. Zhu Di also saw Sheng Yong and others would not let him go on his way unmolested. Only did he eliminate these worries on his back, could he achieve the final victory.

In May, the southern and northern armies finally met at Little River near the Sui River. The commander of the southern army was still Ping An. In reality, if it was an open and head to head fight, the northern army didn't have much advantage. The two sides fought fiercely and although the northern army had the edge, for some time it failed to defeat the road blocker. Now the southern army was short on provisions. Zhu Di guessed that this was the moment when the southern army was the weakest. If a general attack was launched the problem would be solved. But Zhu Di was not a man who would play his cards fairly without suspicion for scrutiny. He still used his most favored method, stealthy raid.

As usual, he deployed his troops across the river. But he actually withdrew his main force thirty lis away. Under the cover of darkness in the midnight, he crossed the river and attacked the southern army. Zhu Di didn't sleep that night and personally commanded the raid. He originally thought the midnight river crossing raid would completely destroy the southern army. But he didn't expect on the other side of the river, he would meet an old acquaintance who had created so many troubles for him in the past.

Having crossed the river, Zhu Di formed his troops and then launched the attack to Ping An's army, who was in fact not prepared. Panic ensued. Just when the whole army was about to collapse, an army appeared. This was southern army's reinforcement. The one commanding the army was no other than the brother in law of Zhu Di's, Xu Hui Zu. He marched his troops day and night. Arriving early wouldn't be better than arriving just in time. He immediately ordered his force to attack.

Zhu Di never thought behind the praying mantis, who was on a cicada, there was a

swallow. In the deep night there was an extra army. After suffering some beating in the confusion, he realized the situation was not good and ordered a retreat. On the heels of victory, Xu Hui Zu soundly defeated the northern army and killed Li Bin, a general of the northern army.

This raid of Zhu Di's can be described as failing to steal a chicken and also lost some grains. Not only did he not accomplish his strategic task, he also lost many soldiers. In addition, even bigger troubles were waiting for him.

Once back at the main camp, anger that had been brooding for a long time among his generals finally erupted. Being charged with the crime of treason, they had been fighting hard with their lives. Despite Zhu Di brought many victories to them, as the war progressed, they also saw success still seemed to be very far away. This expedition could be said as an all-in affair. They would go all the way to the capital. But now they suffered a major defeat and they hadn't even seen the suburb of the capital yet. On matters about losing one's head, they could not be reckless. At least they needed an explanation. They all asked to cross the river to find another place to bivouac (in truth it was just a retreat in disguise).

In fact Zhu Di himself was also uncertain. The claim that they would fight all the way to the capital was just a promise, how could it be taken seriously? Besides, there were so many rogue drivers and trolls demanding payments on the highways, it would be harder than hard to enter the city with songs sung. But they were already where they were and if they retreated, the troops would panic. They had to hang on no matter what!

As usual, he declared in a solemn tone: "In this battle, there is no retreat!" Then he ordered those who wanted to stay to stand on his right and those who wanted to cross the river to stand on his left. Zhu Di's wishful thinking was usually in this kind of activities that required un-anonymous vote, no one would dare to publicly oppose him. But this time, he was wrong.

The generals moved to his left in droves. This time Zhu Di was out of means. He got very angry and said: "You do what you have to do!" Then he sat down and sulked. At this difficult moment, Zhu Neng stood up. He supported Zhu Di and in a loud voice he said to the other generals: "Everyone, please hang on to the end. Back then when Liu Bang, the Supreme Grandfather of Han, lost nine out of ten battles, didn't he still eventually acquire the world? Now the enemy is tired and stranded here. We are on the verge of winning, how can we think about retreat?"

The generals mummed, which didn't necessarily mean they believed Zhu Neng's words. Rather it was because after Zhang Yu's death, Zhu Neng became the top general and he was well respected. In addition he had many confidants in the army. If anyone ran amok of him, there could be bad consequences. After this ado, they vented what they wanted to vent and

they said what they wanted to say. They were already aboard a pirate ship. They had to do what they needed to do.

With gratification Zhu Di looked at Zhu Neng, the man who stood up at the critical moment to support him. He had wavered before but the brutal reality told him he had to stay on with the course. Just like before, regardless of the difficulty, as long as he stuck to it, there would be hope.

The outcome of a war is often decided by the exertion to “hang on a little more”.

Chapter Thirty One

Martyrdom, Mystery, Atrocity, and Feebleness

Lingbi, the final victory

It seemed to be designed to collaborate with Zhu Di's resolution, unbeknownst to others, someone made the idiotic suggestion to recall Xu Hui Zu back to defend the capital, on the ground that the northern army was about to lose. Thus the recently victorious Xu Hui Zu was called back. Remaining at the Little River to oppose Zhu Di were only Ping An and He Fu. Reasoning that the place was not easy to defend, after some discussions, the two men decided to join force and move to garrison Lingbi.

But a leaking roof ran afoul of an overnight rain. The troops under the two men were already exhausted. In addition, the troops guarding the delivery of the provisions were also defeated by Zhu Di. All the provisions were taken. That took away the life line of the southern army. If they couldn't even feed themselves, how could they fight? Thus the two men met and decided to escape the next day. To ensure coordinated actions, they also agreed on a signal: three peals of cannon fire.

The next day, the southern troops were packing to leave. All of a sudden there were three peals of cannon fire. Soldiers heard the signal and without hesitation, they started running. But they never thought the three cannon fires were not signaled by their own men. On the contrary, it was the signal of attack by the northern army!

Actually the northern army also decided to use the same signal and it was also three peals of cannon fire!

Really? If you have bad luck, you can't blame the government.

It was a hilarious scene. Preparing for an attack, the northern army met just in time the fleeing southern army. No mercy was needed. The northern army gave chase. Not only did they annihilate the entire southern army, they also captured Ping An and thirty six other generals. Only He Fu ran faster. He fled alone.

Zhu Di's persistence finally was rewarded with a victory. He kicked away the final

stumbling block on his road forward and started to advance to the final destination.

The Battle of Lingbi completely destroyed the main force of the southern army. From now on, the south would never be able to organize a decent counterattack. After numerous toils and tribulations and vanquishing numerous enemies, Zhu Di finally saw the dawning light of triumph.

Sheng Yong, Tie Xuan, and Ping An are behind me. No one can stop my advance!

Zhu Di's next target was Yangzhou. The defender of the city was Supervising Censor Wang Bin, who initially wanted to resist. But he was betrayed by his men. Yangzhou surrendered without a fight.

The loss of Yangzhou stroke a heavy blow to southern army's moral. Today, we don't even have to look at the map. Anyone with elementary geographical knowledge should know the distance between Yangzhou and Nanjing. Zhu Di's War of Cleansing the Court finally reached its last phase. He only needed to take one more step to walk into the capital he had been dreaming about.

Sitting inside the imperial palace, Zhu Yun Wen's panic reached the extreme. He never expected the effort to eliminate the guardian princes eventually would threaten his throne. He didn't know what to do. Qi Tai and Huang Zi Cheng were not in the capital. Among his group of advisors, only Fang Xiao Ru was around. Under the circumstance, he had to ask for advice from the bookish man.

Fang Xiao Ru was rather very confident. Without any sign of panic, he employed his scholarly aptitude and proposed a few countermeasures. First, send officials out to recruit soldiers, then, mobilize the nation to defend the emperor. To buy time, someone should be sent to negotiate with Zhu Di to express the willingness to cede territory. The purpose was to let down Zhu Di's guard.

Impressed by his confidence, Zhu Yun Wen followed his advice and hoped the bookman would be able to give him a hand at the last moment.

Later events proved that Fang Xiao Ru was indeed a first rate loyal official. But he was definitely not a first rate achiever. His proposals like recruiting soldiers and mobilizing the nation were not something that would provide the real solution. Zhu Di was already on the doorstep, there was no time. As for negotiating with Zhu Di and using territories to buy time was like an idiot's dream. Playing tricks to buy time was what Zhu Di good at, how could he be taken by Fang Xiao Ru. Zhu Di had worked tirelessly and industriously for four years. What he wanted was not just a piece of land to become a landlord. He wanted everything in the world.

Nonetheless, the officials followed Fang Xiao Ru's plan to arrange everything. Among them, the most important task of negotiating with Zhu Di was given to Princess of Qingcheng. Readers should not be mistaken to judge her position in the family hierarchy based on her title. In fact she was Zhu Yuan Zhang's niece and an elder of Zhu Yun Wen's. Per her rank and age, she was Zhu Di's cousin.

Princess of Qingcheng crossed the Yangtze River to negotiate with Zhu Di, who received her warmly, which gave the princess the impression that Zhu Di was someone with whom matters could be discussed. She reasoned movingly and said a lot of words about there ought to be no fratricide. Zhu Di listened with attention and nodded frequently to indicate his approval.

The princess was enlightened by the mood. Then she paused to wait for Zhu Di's reply. Seeing she had finished, Zhu Di finally opened his mouth. But what he said really scared the princess.

Zhu Di said in a calm tone: "The purpose for me to send my troops is to revenge on my father's behalf (on what basis did this come about?), to eliminate treacherous court officials. I am doing what the Duke of Zhou did, which is to uphold the government[148]. I hope the emperor would agree with my request."

Then he looked at his cousin with a meaningful expression and continued: "If my request is not accepted, I'll take the city. I hope my brothers will move immediately to live temporarily at father's mausoleum. I am afraid they may be frightened."

Finished, Zhu Di remained silent.

This was a threat, a naked threat! The princess looked at her brother with an expression of incredulity. What she just said was all nothing. This good brother of her not only would do what he intended, but also even threatened her. She now realized in this man's mind there were no brothers and sisters. To him, there were only two kinds of people, those who supported him or those who opposed him.

The princess didn't know Zhu Di and it was impossible for her to know Zhu Di. She could not imagine it had taken painful deliberations and endurance of hardships for Zhu Di to have to come to this moment. Victory was right in front of him. It would be like a day dream if one could be dispatched by just a few words.

Zhu Di wrote his conversation with the princess in a letter and asked her to bring it back to indicate his stance.

[148] In early Zhou Dynasty, the Duke of Zhou became the regent ruler of the country when the king was young. Later when the king grew up, he voluntarily ceded the power to the king.

Zhu Yun Wen learned the result of the negotiation. He finally realized all of his imaginations were annulled. His opponent didn't issue and would not issue an order to "not harm my nephew". He looked attentively at everything in the palace. The eunuchs, the maids, and the officials were still respectful to him. But he knew in his heart even if soon after a new owner came to the palace, they would still behave the same way.

They were really just servants. As long as their interests were guaranteed, change of master was really not an important issue to them.

Zhu Yun Wen finally found out the one who was said to own the world was just a lonely and a helpless man. His life was not about enjoying wealth and dignity. Since the day he acceded to the throne, misery began. He had to be on guard against his officials, the guardian princes, the eunuchs, and all others around him. He and his throne was an open target. He had to deal with the pressure and attacks from both inside and outside at all times.

He would spend his entire life to guard his power. As soon as the throne that represented the power was taken, it meant the end of his life. For an emperor, being a kind of rare produce, there could be one and only one in a unified era. This was the law of nature, as well as the law of the society.

The biggest mistake Zhu Yun Wen made was he didn't know at the moment of Zhu Di's rebellion, both men's fates, Zhu Di's and his, were sealed. There was certainly no way back for the rebelled Zhu Di, indeed he also had no way back. Since ancient times in any power struggle, there could be only one winner, either him or the other.

It is already where it is, so everything has to be left to Heaven!

An empty promise

Having refused Zhu Yun Wen's peace overture, Zhu Di launched his final assault. He deployed his army at the Mouth of Puzi and intended to cross the Yangtze River from here to attack the capital. But he didn't see that at the last moment he met a stubborn resistance.

The one who resisted was Sheng Yong. He led the southern troops on a desperate counter attack and defeated the northern army. For the moment Zhu Di was stopped. Sheng Yong deserved his acclamation of being a celebrity general. Even at the last crucial moment he didn't give up. He chose to hang on resolutely. He proved his loyalty with his actions, although he didn't keep the loyalty to the end.

Sheng Yong's resistance had some unexpected effects. Having been on a prolonged expedition, Zhu Di's army was at a tipping point. The soldiers were very tired and they didn't want to fight anymore. They wanted to go back to recoup. This time Zhu Di also hesitated

because he could see his troops were indeed at the limit of endurance. The entire army could collapse if he continued the fight.

If Zhu Di withdrew, history would have been rewritten. It is said that Heaven would help the ones who wished. Zhu Gao Xu, the cad who was released by Huang Zi Cheng's brilliant decision, came with his force to help. That helped Zhu Di immensely. He was ecstatic. He patted on his son's back and said emotionally: "Work hard, the Royal Highness isn't healthy!"

The so-named Royal Highness was his eldest son Zhu Gao Chi. To Zhu Gao Xu, these words sounded like a decree to pass the throne to him. Thus he exerted all of his effort to attack Sheng Yong. Under the support of Zhu Gao Xu's fresh troops, the northern army soundly defeated Sheng Yong. Then they crossed the Yangtze River and arrived at the capital, the final destination.

Zhu Gao Xu definitely would exert with everything he had, because the country would be his if it was taken. If he didn't fight hard, who else would? But he didn't seem to analyze Zhu Di's words carefully. All Zhu Di said was the health of the Royal Highness was not good. He didn't say the throne would be passed to him. The nuance of the words lied in how someone interpreted it. The reality later showed the words that carried too much information were only an empty promise to Zhu Gao Xu.

Zhu Gao Xu was a well-known smart man. But on the degree of smartness, he was still not as good as his father. He seemed to have forgotten a check would only realize its value once it's cashed. But obviously his father was not a banker. Rather he got his start by robbing banks. If the check written by such a man could be cashed, it would be a miracle.

Anyway, Zhu Di now had achieved his goal. He crossed the Yangtze River without trouble. The next step was to enter the city. But the last step wasn't that easy. We have said previously the city was built by the Ming government, with the sponsorship of the rich merchant Shen Wan San. The walls were all built with granite stones laid using a mix of lime and sticky rice flour. It was very strong. In addition, there were more than a hundred thousand troops in the city. Taking the city was something easier said than done!

In the city Zhu Yun Wen also recognized this. He refused the proposal to escape to the south. He followed Fang Xiao Ru's advice to defend the city. Fang Xiao Ru was indeed a man of character. When Zhu Yun Wen feared he would not be able to hold the city and asked him what he should do if the city was lost, he even said: "Even if the city can't be held, it is a matter of course that Your Majesty the Emperor dies for the country!"

Although Fang Xiao Ru was a scholar who never had been in battles in his life, at the critical moment of life and death, he showed his mettle and pride. He was truly admirable and

praiseworthy.

Even so said, the strong defense of the capital was one of the reasons for Fang Xiao Ru's tough words. Zhu Di couldn't even take Jinan, not to mention the capital.

But Fang Xiao Ru didn't understand the strongest fortification in the world was often taken from the inside. Zhu Di was not a fool. If he dared to surround the city, he certainly had his method for taking the city. Besides, the method was very effective.

Zhu Di's method for taking the city was his spies. Now it is time to introduce two of his senior spies. The two men were assigned to guard the Golden Gorge Gate, one was Zhu Hui, the Prince of Gu. The other was Li Jing Long.

Li Jing Long had known Zhu Di since his childhood. Although later they fought against each other, Li Jing Long was capable of discerning private and public affairs. Regardless how hard they fought, his affection toward Zhu Di was not affected. In addition, from his record of commanding troops, he would be counted as one of those contributors for Zhu Di's taking of the country.

Although Li Jing Long had suffered many defeats and was scolded as an idiotic wastrel, he wasn't marred on his loyalty. His later action to privately collaborate with Zhu Di donned a new hat on his head, a traitor. If the War of Cleansing the Court could be compared to a football match, Li Jing Long's earlier actions could be thought as a crappy guard scored an own goal. But after he decided to betray his own master, he became a man who played dishonestly.

Thus, Li Jing Long finally took off all of his camouflages. Not only did he have no shame, he didn't even want a mask. Later he continued to live on his last legs under Zhu Di's rule. Overall, he led the life of a feeble and shameless man. If Li Wen Zhong knew he had given birth to such a son, he would have died of rage one more time.

It was not unusual that the shameless Li Jing Long lived shamelessly because that was his way of life.

With the help of the two traitors, Zhu Di's army entered the capital. The ownership of the country changed.

Moral integrity

When it comes to maintaining integrity, many people often have something to say about it. It is also often used as a cudgel to beat others. But real moral integrity is always showing itself in dire situations. When that moment occurs, the result of maintaining one's moral integrity is often not flowers and applauses.

Only real heroes are able to show their moral integrity when put under the butcher's knife.

This kind of moral integrity is the real courage.

Zhu Yun Wen sat in the palace dumbfounded. He was not necessarily unprepared for the arrival of this day. But when it finally came, it seemed so cruel. He could not be an emperor anymore. He could not be an ordinary person anymore. Embarked on this road, he truly couldn't go back anymore.

Now, the advisors that had been around him had all disappeared. Those bookish men who had orated in grandiloquence finally saw there was a gap between theory and practice. At the last moment, even Qi Tai and Huang Zi Cheng disappeared. Zhu Yun Wen now completely understood how one felt when he was betrayed by the ones that had been closest to him. He angrily shouted to the huge hollow hall: "You are the ones who gave me these ideas, now you have all run away when things are bad!" But now his angry shouts no longer got any response from the officials. What he got in reply were only the echoes from the deep and vast hall.

At such a moment, it was meaningless to place the blame on anyone. He looked back at this palace, in which he spent his childhood. This was a place where everyone looked up to and admired. It was such a glory and glamor being born into an imperial family.

He was familiar with every single plant and every single tree. But as a prince, he didn't feel good about it. As the heir to the throne he had always borne too much and too great pressure. In his eyes, everyone here was a daemon. They didn't care about anything and used all kinds of intrigues, defamations, and slanders to hurt others. All these for just one goal, power.

Was the scene at the summit really that good? Zhu Yun Wen grimaced. He knew very well the cold chill could be unbearable at the top. Ironically, although everyone seemed to know the meaning of this statement, everyone would not heed it. They would still continuously to climb to the summit.

Burn the palace down, destroy it completely!

Zhu Yun Wen's complains and rages were reasonable, but he actually underestimated the moral integrity of his advisors. Qi Tai, Huang Zi Cheng and many other men didn't flee. They exerted to salvage the Court from its demise.

Qi Tai was recruiting troops in Guangde and Huang Zi Cheng was recruiting in Suzhou. Lian Zi Ning and Huang Guan were recruiting in Hangzhou. Although the actions of the bookmen weren't enough to really save the country, they did their best to fulfill their promises. Thus today we can say that they were a bunch of brave men of moral integrity.

Qi Tai and Huang Zi Cheng were captured in turn. Both were executed. They were not subdued when threatened by death.

Huang Guan, whom we have introduced previously, was the other one who aced the three levels of imperial exams. At the time he was the right assistant deputy minister.

He wasn't able to get much done with his recruiting effort. But after hearing the news that the capital was about to be lost, he still insisted on going to the capital. Although he knew there wouldn't be a chance for his survival once he went. But to him, he was fulfilling his promise. The significance of performing one's duty was far more important than living in submission.

When he arrived in Anqing, news arrived, the capital was taken and the new emperor had already taken the throne. Huang Guan knew all was lost. But he didn't panic like many imagined. He only sobbed in lamentation: "My wife is a virtuous woman, she must have died."

Then he evoked his wife's spirit. After the necessary ceremony, he sailed downstream on the Yangtze River. Upon arriving at the Pier at Luosha, he put on his attire, paid tribute to the east, and drowned.

Huang Guan wasn't mistaken. Before he killed himself, his wife already took her two daughters and a dozen other relatives to Huaiqing Bridge and killed themselves by jumping into the Yangtze River. In the end, the husband and wife eventually reunited.

As Zhu Yun Wen's confidant and martyr, Huang Guan was resented by Zhu Di. He removed Huang Guan's name from the list of those who passed the imperial exams. Thus in the Ming history there was the record of only one who aced all three levels of imperial exams. Although we have previously mentioned this, I still want to restore his honor again for this brave man:

Huang Guan aced all three tiers of imperial exams. His name was removed from the list of those who placed by the usurper Zhu Di. He died in keeping his loyalty to the emperor.

I believe truth cannot be concealed forever.

Those who kept their moral integrity weren't limited to just the few named above. Huang Yan and Wang Shu Ying, editors of the Imperial Academy, upon hearing the news that Qi Tai had been captured, knew all was over. They bathed and changed clothes and wrote the last words of their lives:

> *Born as such, being unable to contribute in time of need;*
> *Die as so, bearing no regret to posterity.*

They both committed suicide. The two scholars did all they could have done. Just as what they said in their words of farewell, they led their lives without reproach and they didn't have any regret to their posterities.

In fact maintaining one's moral integrity wasn't something that belonged to only nobles

and aristocrats, ordinary people also upheld their moral integrity.

A woodsman in Taizhou was a man of moral integrity. He didn't leave his name in history, which was normal because at the time he was just a commoner. He went to the mountain to fell logs and then brought them to the city to sell. He never changed his price and he never cheated. Many people bought his firewood. Regardless how one might look at it, he should have nothing to do with the War of Cleansing the Court. But he was such a man that upon hearing the news that the capital was sacked, he committed suicide by drowning himself in the East Lake.

Perhaps many would think he was foolish. Regardless which emperor was on the throne, he would still be able to log his wood and live his life. But I feel his action showed us justice is in people's hearts.

As an ordinary woodsman, he cared about the world. As an ordinary man, he wasn't able to express his anger and remonstrate. Drowning himself in the lake then became his only way of expressing himself.

An ordinary person can become a hero, as long as you have the courage.

Besides scholars and commoners, a general also showed his loyalty. The man, Zhang Lun, was a general under Sheng Yong. After Sheng Yong was defeated and surrendered, the northern army also hoped to persuade him. Zhang Lun smiled and said: "Do you think I am someone who is going to betray himself?"

Finished, he gallantly met his death.

Zhang Lun was not a notable general. We didn't mention his name previously. Although he didn't achieve much in battle, he was a man worthy of admiration. On the contrary, such professional generals as Sheng Yong and Ping An all surrendered to Zhu Di.

Sheng Yong and Ping An were highly talented and capable of strategies. They fought numerous battles but they were not comparable to their subordinates and an ordinary woodsman! What a pity.

A mystery

Of course, Zhu Yun Wen didn't know the gallant actions of his officials. He burned his palace and then disappeared. Thus one of the biggest mysteries in history was born. But the mystery didn't begin at the disappearance of Zhu Yun Wen. Long before Zhu Di entered the capital, the northern army received a strange order. They would not be allowed to enter the palace. Rather they would retreat to the relay station at the Dragon River. Apparently Zhu Di didn't want to be burdened with the guilt for killing his nephew. He encircled the palace to

give some time for Zhu Yun Wen to kill himself or abdicate the throne.

But Zhu Yun Wen's choice was out of his anticipation. By burning the palace, Zhu Yun Wen showed he didn't want to abdicate. But the somewhat the brave nephew also didn't kill himself. After entering the palace, Zhu Di didn't find Zhu Yun Wen's body. He neither abdicated nor killed himself. The only possibility remained was he escaped.

Zhu Yun Wen's whereabouts became an everlasting mystery. This incident triggered great reactions and chain effects. Zhu Yun Wen's escape itself was like a detective novel. We'll analyze this in greater detail later. For now, we'll leave it here.

Atrocities

Zhu Di finally took the throne. He thought he deserved it because he already paid too much for it. For numerous times his life was hanging on a thread and for numerous times he was on the verge of failure, with which he got today's triumph.

After a short period of excitement, Zhu Di immediately recognized he had more important things to do. That was to eliminate those who opposed him taking the throne. Thus a rare display of atrocities in history began.

The first one Zhu Di summoned was Fang Xiao Ru. He knew Fang Xiao Ru's reputation was well-known to the world. In addition, long before he took the capital city, Dao Yan told him: "After taking the capital, Fang Xiao Ru will not surrender. But Your Highness must not kill him! If he is killed, the scholarly spirit of the world will become extinct!"

Having warned by the senior advisor, Zhu Di of course didn't dare to take the matter lightly. He anticipated Fang Xiao Ru would not easily surrender. But he also didn't imagine the matter would morph into one of the record setting tragedies in history.

Zhu Di received Fang Xiao Ru in his big hall. He hoped Fang Xiao Ru would draft an imperial decree. Actually drafting the decree could be done by someone else. But if it was written by Fang Xiao Ru, it would have the better effect of calming the mind of the people in the world. The decree had to be written by Fang Xiao Ru.

But Zhu Di never thought that, being summoned, Fang Xiao Ru didn't come to write the decree. Rather he showed his ability as a censor and wanted to have a debate on the legality of the right for the succession.

Fang Xiao Ru entered the hall crying. He didn't respond to Zhu Di and also didn't salute. Zhu Di was embarrassed and urged him: "Sir, don't act like this. All I have done is just like what the Duke of Zhou did to uphold the government."

These words enraged Fang Xiao Ru. He sternly asked: "Where is the King of Cheng?![149]"

"He burned himself to death."

"Where is the son of King of Cheng?!"

"The country needs an adult ruler."

"Then where is the brother of the King of Cheng?!"

"This is our family matter."

Society Youth Zhu Di finally got a taste of the prowess of the best debater and the expert on succession laws. He wasn't patient enough. He gave a pen and paper to Fang Xiao Ru and forced him to write.

Fang Xiao Ru wouldn't write.

He was forced to write again.

Fang Xiao Ru wrote four words: "The thief from Yan, the usurper."

Zhu Di was so enraged he lost his control:

"If you don't write, aren't you afraid I'll execute to the ninth relations of your kinsmen?![150]"

"Dare you to kill the tenth relations of my kinsmen![151]"

Realistically, when Fang Xiao Ru uttered these words, he probably didn't think Zhu Di would really execute all of his kinsmen. But he didn't know Zhu Di, who was not the kind of person making ostentatious threats to say something like you will not be able to see tomorrow's sun. But he was one who would guarantee the sun would shine on your tombstone next year.

Also he was a virtuoso in laws of violence and would use it at the appropriate times. At least his skill at using it exceeded that of Chen You Liang's. He understood one important rule:

Violence can't resolve everything, but it can resolve you.

He ordered to pull Fang Xiao Ru out of the hall.

The final verdict on Fang Xiao Ru was: Death by slicing and execution of all of his extended family.

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[149] The King of Cheng was the son of King of Zhou, who died when he was still an infant. Thus the Duke of Zhou became the regent king of Zhou.

[150] There is no commonly accepted definition for the Chinese phrase 九族 which probably generally means all the blood kinsmen having the same grandfather. Here it probably means all the parents, siblings, cousins of the person and his wife. In general, the whole family clan is included.

[151] Here the Chinese phrase 十族 had not been an established term. Since the number ten is one more than nine, it simply signifies the extent of the relationship. Because it was not a term of common meaning, here it was simply used by Fang Xiao Ru to show his resolve against Zhu Di's threat.

In history there had been only the kinsmen of the entire clan. But human beings once again exhibited their amazing creativity. The extra tier of the relations would have to be attributed to Zhu Di's invention and creativity. To make up the quota, in his list of execution, he added Fang Xiao Ru's friends and students.

Fang Xiao Ru was a man who dared to resist brutality. He died in a very cruel way but it was all worth it. His action should be an exemplar for all scholars and should be remembered by us.

Based on analysis of criminal psychology, it is the most difficult for a murder to commit the first kill. Once he gets its start, more killings become easier.

Thus Zhu Di began his massacre.

Because the descriptions below are too bloody and brutal, we will describe in short and formal Chinese[152]. Readers who can't stand them may opt to skip.

To Tie Xuan, his ears and nose were cut off, cooked, and stuffed into his mouth. Zhu Di asked: "Taste good?" Tie Xuan replied: "How can the flesh of a loyal official and filial son not taste good!?" He was sliced and his sons were executed.

Huang Zi Cheng was sliced and his extended family members were executed[153].

Qi Tai was executed by fine cuts and his extended family members were executed.

Lian Zi Ning was sliced and his immediate family members were executed.

Zhuo Jing was sliced and his immediate family members were executed.

Chen Di was sliced and his sons were executed.

In addition, Tie Xuan's wife and daughters, Fang Xiao Ru's daughters, Qi Tai's wife, and Huang Zi Cheng's sister were sent to the office in charge of the imperial music school as prostitutes.

Nothing can be said on these and nothing can be said about these.

Wimpish

When reading up to here, many people would exclaim Zhu Di was a homicidal maniac. But the reality was not so.

Just as we have said before, Zhu Di was a man with two faces. His brutality was shown

[152] Formal Chinese is a form of written Chinese that was in use in almost all written official documents and common literatures until the end of imperial China. Here I translate them into modern English.

[153] Here the Chinese phrase 三族 generally means the person's parents, siblings, and children. Again, there has been no definitive definition for the term.

only to those who opposed him. The massacre to those who opposed him didn't mean he was strong. On the contrary, it showed his weakness in his lack of confidence in himself.

Upon learning his wife committed adultery with a politician, Caesar in ancient Rome wasn't driven out of control by his outrage, although in his position and with his power he would easily be able to punish that man. He divorced his wife and later put the man who committed adultery with his wife to an important position.

Caesar wasn't a fool. He also was not Wu the Elder[154]. He was a man of strong desire for power. He brushed aside his wife's infidel behavior because he was very confident in his own position and reputation. He was magnanimous and convinced what belonged to him would eventually remained to be his.

Yes, from history we can see that magnanimity never means weakness.

Zhu Di was a weak man because he got to the throne via illegitimate means. In day and night he worried someone else would copy him and take away his place. He was also fearful of the chatters on the street corners. Thus he continuously butchered those who opposed him. He changed history but in reality there were always ones who opposed him. In history he also left a mark of him being brutal.

Through the mist of history, what we see is not a strong and confident Zhu Di. On the contrary, in the gleaming throne, there sat an ashen faced middle aged man, he looked at everyone around him with an alert stare and incessantly told them:

"This is my throne, don't come near."

I believe this is the truth of the history.

Things finally settled down for the time being. As usual, Zhu Di was in a state of profound deliberation. Having experienced such stormy tumult, for the moment, no one knew what he was thinking. Usually in a moment like this, no one dared to bother Zhu Di. But Zhu Neng was an exception. He had made glorious achievements and was Zhu Di's top confidant. To report on the progress of searching for the remnants of Emperor Establishing Civility, he walked to Zhu Di like before and opened his mouth, which broke the silence:

"Your Highness,……"

Zhu Di suddenly raised his head and stared at Zhu Neng very coldly.

Zhu Neng was terrified. The horrendous stare sent chill throughout his body. Even fighting

[154] Wu the Elder is a fictional character in one the most well-known Chinese novels written in the late Ming Dynasty, in which Wu the Elder married a beautiful young wife who committed adultery with another men. But he was unable to do much against the man because he was very short in stature. Later he tried to fight against the man but he was murdered by the man and his wife. In general the character has been used to describe someone who is short and feeble.

in the battlefields didn't make him feel so terrified. He knew he made a grave mistake. Thus he corrected himself.

"Emperor."

Zhu Di finally entered to the great hall that represented the ultimate power. The great hall wasn't strange to him. Previously he often came to kowtow to pay his tribute, or to come to ask for mercy. But this time it was different. He had become the owner of this place. He was sitting in the emperor's throne and looked at his officials. Although the seat still belonged to his nephew Zhu Yun Wen not very long ago, and although his succession would be abnormal in terms the materiality and the procedure of the laws, there was one rule which would guarantee he could reasonably occupy the seat, albeit illegally.

The name of the rule was the one who succeeded would be the king and the one who lost would be the bandit.

Zhu Di finally won. He received the salutes from his officials, which was what he deserved. He did it through his effort and now it was the time for a reward. The apparition of his father seemed to appear in front of him again.

Although you didn't offer the throne to me, I still got it through my own effort. With my exertion, I will use my actions to prove that I am the best successor for the empire. I am not going to disappoint you. The mighty empire will become mightier in my hands! I will ensure that your glory will be carried forward to posterity and that everyone will have to look up on us, on our great country!

The Great Ming!

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